SHORT STORY WRITING

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This Book is Dedicated
to
My Father and Mother

PREFACE

This book is the result of twelve years of teaching story writing to university extension students in evening classes and in home study courses. It has taken shape gradually, as one student after another, wrestling with some practical problem, has brought his perplexities to the instructor for counsel and help.

The artist in any field needs all the help he can get. Not even the literary genius can hope to rise full-blown out of his own chaotic emotions and impulses. However great his endowments, he must bend himself to a study of the principles of his art and the details of technique. For the fiction writer who has to work wholly alone there are likely to be long periods of floundering and unprofitable struggle to hamper and discourage him. Conscious, perhaps, of a flaw in a story, he may spend hours trying to discover what it is or how to remedy it, for lack of the practical knowledge familiar to every craftsman. He is fortunate if he has at hand a candid and experienced critic. Geniuses cannot be made, but most certainly even the genius can be helped.

Most people who want to write, moreover, are not geniuses. They may have some spark of talent which, properly nursed along, will produce results. They need to be helped to find exactly what that spark is and what it can do. They need to do a good deal of experimenting, and they need, above all, honest criticism. The really talented person is usually eager for criticism.

He has the humility to know that he requires it and the courage to stand up under it. He may not agree with it, but he will think it over and take the good and reject the bad. The experience of every teacher will, I think, verify this statement. Give me the eager, responsive student, anxious and alert to try out suggestions, willing to experiment with new ideas, and I will venture that he possesses, buried deep perhaps, but nevertheless much alive, some spark of ability, some justification for his urge to write. The thrill that comes to student and instructor alike, when the artistic principle involved in a given problem is realized, and the way is cleared to a satisfactory solution, is ample reward for the time and effort expended.

This book seeks, accordingly, to give those who wish to write stories, whether working in a class or alone, practical help in making the most of their powers. It seeks to aid the student in developing a clear realization, a definite *feeling,* of *what the short story is,* and what *he* may be able to do with it as a medium of expressing his own ideas. It outlines for him the more important principles involved in writing stories. It gives him a series of practical suggestions, not too difficult or fine-spun, which will develop his powers in the way found by long experience to be helpful for training.

It provides him also with laboratory material, in the form of a number of stories by authors of distinction, some of them contemporary, some of earlier date, which illustrate the main features of the story writer's art. The text discussion of theory, and the exercises suggested for the student's practice, are related at every step to these typical stories.

"Short Story Writing" is not to be regarded as an exhaustive treatise, but rather as a sort of guide post to the reader who is hovering on the edge of the world of literature. That world, whether one lives in it as a creative artist or as an appreciative reader, is infinitely rich in satisfactions. One of the most amazing facts about life is the richness of reward that comes from growth in artistic appreciation. Today you can enjoy a classic that left you cold five years ago. Is that growth worth while? Has it repaid your thought and study? Infinitely! The first time you hear a symphony you find it, perhaps, tiresome. The next time you begin to see its beauty; and your pleasure grows each time you hear it. Are you repaid for listening? Are you repaid for your visits to art galleries when you find that your appreciation grows with each pilgrimage? The same rewards await the student of literature. If the discussion in this book, together with the illustrations from the work of master craftsmen, gives the reader an impetus to growth, either in ability to write or in ability to enjoy the short story, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

Mary B. Orvis

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	Introduction	3
I	The Nature of the Short Story	7
II	What Makes a Narrative Dramatic	17
III	Plot	34
IV	Where Do Authors Get Their Plots	42
V	Lines of Struggle	47
VI	Amount of Complication Necessary	59
VII	Characterization	63
VIII	Depicting Character and Handling Conversation	73
IX	The Three Stages of Action	82
X	On Studying Personality Scientifically	102
XI	The Angle of Narration	111
XII	Setting and Atmosphere	122
XIII	Setting Dominating Character	130
XIV	Beginning Your Story	145
XV	The Creative Personality	151
XVI	Things to Avoid	160
XVII	Marketing	167

TYPICAL SHORT STORIES

The Killers	Ernest Hemingway	173
The Doll's House	Katherine Mansfield	185

Six Dollars	Wilbur Daniel Steele	195
Quality	John Galsworthy	225
The Father	Björnstjerne Björnson	233
The Birthmark	Nathaniel Hawthorne	237
The Cask of Amontillado	Edgar Allan Poe	259
The Adoption	Guy de Maupassant	267
Moonlight	Guy de Maupassant	275
Bibliography		283

SHORT STORY WRITING

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Why do you, reader, want to write? If you want to write because something in you must get itself said, because characters are clamoring to be born, because you want to find the meaning of certain moments in human life and want to tell what you have found, well and good. For such people there is all the chance in the world. Editors are combing the mails for new writers who have something to say; people who see life from a fresh angle, or who can portray it effectively from an old angle.

The beginner at short story writing should not attempt to read all of this book straight through at one or two sittings. He should begin by studying Chapter I, "The Nature of the Short Story." Then, before reading on, he should stop and think about his own possibilities as a writer. "What do I have to say? What am I interested in writing about: What interests me most in myself, in my friends, in life? How can I find out more about that thing?"

How does one make a narrative dramatic? Chapter II attempts to give the reader a feeling of the nature of the dramatic, to emphasize the most important elements of dramatic form. The stories reprinted in this book are all dramatic in one way or another. They have been chosen because they are representative of what is good in both the older and the newer writers,

and for certain illustrative purposes. The student ought to familiarize himself thoroughly with these stories and with as many other really good stories as possible. In order that he may have some guidance in further reading, a short, carefully selected list of short story collections is given in the bibliography at the end of the book.

Next, the student should begin to write. How shall he start? He may have a plot in his head. Very well, let him write it. Then let him put it aside and read on through the text about plot, characterization, the angle of narration, the use of atmosphere, and the expression of the author's personality. Then let him come back and view his own story critically. If he can get some honest critic to give his impressions of it, so much the better.

Perhaps you, reader, have no plot in mind. What then? Some students have got under way by means of imitation. Try to write a Maupassant story of today, or to write about some significant moment in life as Katherine Mansfield would have written of it. Try to write about some dramatic event, say a hold-up or a kidnapping, reported in a newspaper, as Hemingway writes about a murder in "The Killers." Or if you want to advance some philosophical idea about what life does to people, see whether you can write a story on some such theme as Galsworthy's "Quality." Your efforts may produce nothing more than a crass imitation, for the waste basket. On the other hand, you may write something that has real significance or beauty.

If you can do none of these things, then try writing a bit of atmospheric description. Before you do that, read Chapter XII, "Setting and Atmosphere," then

write, trying to make others feel the mystery of a certain foggy wind-swept beach at night, or the desolation of an icy field on a bitter January day, or the solitude of a lone man in the moonlight in the country. This beginning may lead you into a real story. Or, if you are interested in writing about character, write a description of some personality that seems outstanding. Can you figure out a situation in which this character would do something that revealed a universal human trait in some really significant way? Can you write of a mere episode in a way to make it interesting, as Maupassant did in "Moonlight"?

All of this is very elementary, but it may serve to get you under way; to break the ice. Everyone has to overcome certain inertias and obstacles in himself. The important thing is to break these bonds and *write*. The quicker one gets to writing experimentally, the better. The more one writes and puts away and brings out and revises, the better. It is good to compare one's work with that of great authors who have dealt with similar material; but the main thing is the actual writing, and lots of it. It is a truism to say that literature is a hard mistress, but it is a fact which must be faced. Success even for the most talented comes only at the cost of much unrewarded effort, infinite discouragement. Few writers succeed in selling manuscripts until they have spent years in writing and trying to market their work.

One must accept the vicissitudes of authorship at the beginning. To expect immediate success is folly, and to depend upon financial reward for sustenance is suicide. The beginner must regard fiction writing as an avocation, a delightful pastime, a speculation—he

invests time and effort in some chips which may bring him rich rewards in self-expression, in the admiration of his fellows, in money and in fame. Unless he is willing to take the loss with a shrug, unless he can be a good sport, he does not belong in the writing game. Moreover, he does not belong in it unless he has determination. The person who gets discouraged easily, has, of course, no really vital interest in writing. He does not deserve success. Too many fail simply because they are disheartened by the first rejection slip. They fail to realize that the most famous writers encountered rejection slips in the beginning; that a manuscript may sell to the fifteenth editor to whom it is sent and that later all fifteen editors may come craving another chance at the work of a genius.

The young writer should experience as much as he can, should write much, should seek out all possible criticism, and should then make continuous efforts to market his manuscripts—provided, of course, that he has reason other than his own desire, to believe that the manuscript is worth printing. If he is unable to sell his own manuscripts, he should make use of some of the reputable literary agencies which will view his work from the standpoint of editors, estimate its chances, and market it if it is salable.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE SHORT STORY

What is a short story? Is it merely a long one cut down, or does it have definite limitations of subject-matter and definite technique? Critics do not agree. Authors do not agree.

Ruth Suckow, for instance, writing in *The Saturday Review of Literature,* says that there is no such thing as "the" short story. The very use of the word "the" implies a rigidity that does not exist. Short stories may be "a running commentary upon life; fireflies in the dark; questions and answers; fragments, or small finished bits of beauty; whatever, in fact, their author has the power to make of them." Katherine Mansfield, in her "Journal" voiced her feeling that the short story was essentially free from structural limitations. Plots left her "cold." She felt guilty if she "betrayed" a story just for the sake of rounding off something. She wanted, above all, to be true to her characters and to the significant moments in their lives. Both of these authors represent a school as different from the school of Poe, O. Henry and Hawthorne as one could possibly imagine.

Walter B. Pitkin,[1] on the other hand, believes that "fiction has a technique no less definite, tho' much less

[1] Walter B. Pitkin, *Short Story Writing,* Copyright, 1926, by The Macmillan Company.

rigid, than the technique of perspective drawing or of harmony and counterpoint in music." He defines the short story and upon his definition rests a rather elaborate structure of rules, good rules for the most part.

Freedom and Form Both Important

Both points of view are important at the outset of any study. The beauty and power of the stories that Ruth Suckow and Katherine Mansfield have written are evidence of the worth of their theory. And, of course, it is generally acknowledged that freedom from rigidity is the very essence of art. Yet the usefulness of Pitkin's definition and rules, as tangible working bases, proves that he is right to a certain degree. The important thing is that the beginner should understand that he has great freedom both in the selection of material and in its treatment. Any story is good that is interesting. Any treatment is good that gets the desired effect. The field of the short story is the whole field of life itself, as it is revealed in some significant moment or in some group of related moments. The author selects from the great mass of impressions and experiences that have come to him the elements which seem interesting or beautiful. These he remoulds into a relationship which has meaning, which gives the reader an emotion or the recognition of some truth. What he does with his material depends entirely upon his personality—upon what he sees—and upon his craftsmanship.

Every teacher knows the refrain, "I want to write, but I cannot make plots." Plot is the great bogey, the false god to whom many a budding genius is sacrificed.

Relieved of the idea that plot is the be-all and end-all of fiction writing, many a beginner may be encouraged to experiment with moods, or atmosphere, or characters, or impressions; and thus find the *particular note which is his note* and which lends meaning to what he may do. It is only by experimentation that the writer finds himself.

Opportunity for the Mature Man or Woman

The short story is a medium particularly suited to the possibilities of the mature writer who has had enough experience to *have something to say.* There is no reason why anyone who sees life clearly in its many relationships, who has gained some degree of insight into human nature and the laws of the universe, who feels deeply and thinks honestly, should fail with the short story—provided, of course, that he knows how to use words effectively.

To Be Read at a Single Sitting

The form of the short story is set chiefly by the requirement that it be brief enough to be read at a single sitting. While there is no limitation upon the length, a good story usually runs between 2,000 and 10,000 words. Its purpose is to interest the reader and to create a vivid impression; above all else, to give him recognition of truth or beauty. The effect may consist in atmosphere ("atmosphere" is the emotional effect of the time and place), as with Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"; or in character, as with Mary E. Wilkins' "The Village Singer"; or in plot, as with

"The Cask of Amontillado" (see page 259). In each of these stories some one element is emphasized which makes the story live in the memory as the theme of an opera lingers, or the rhythm of a piece of jazz.

A Narrative Drama

Pitkin defines the short story as *narrative drama with a single effect.* This definition sets an ideal that can be followed, yet it emphasizes only two qualities: single effect, narrative drama. It gives the student plenty of "rope" for trying his powers out. To use another comparison, the short story is like an etching with the lines deeply engraved. It is as Edith Wharton has said, "a shaft driven straight into the heart of life." Often it resembles the lyric in its intensity of mood. It *lifts from life a big moment,* or a series of moments related to the same thing. In "The Father" (see page 233), for instance, a series of outstanding moments in the life of a simple peasant all lead up to the final moment of renunciation.

One thinks most often of the short story as a small picture. A mural decoration of great size may portray the crusades, the Battle of Waterloo, or the signing of Magna Charta—some event involving many elements and figures. But the etching or the two-by-three foot canvas can only do something smaller, less ambitious, but perhaps more difficult in its simple perfection. It seizes upon some interesting or beautiful object or group of objects, separates them from the surrounding environment, and focuses the attention of the beholder upon them.

The Purpose, Revelation

The primary purpose of the short story is the revelation that is shown through the action of a character or a group of characters under impulse or strong compulsion. It more often deals with some outstanding and determining trait of a character which is acted upon by the things that happen; or which, in turn, shapes the events of the story. It has little to do with family histories, long-drawn-out biographies, or elaborate settings or complications. Such materials belong to the novel, which may deal with the entire life of a character or a group of characters, or even with the lives of their ancestors. The effect of *presentness* is the thing in the short story.

Most of the greatest short stories are extremely simple both in material and in structure. Hawthorne's story "The Birthmark" (see page 237) is a good example of what may be done with a simple theme. All the way through, the reader feels the sinister threat of Aylmer's obsession that he must do away with the blemish on the face of his beautiful wife. That is the whole story, and, by repeated suggestion and implication, combined with close psychological analysis, it gets over.

The Principle of Unity

The writer must know what his impression is to be, what effect he wants to produce, and he must hold to that ideal from the beginning to the end. *The principle of unity is an artistic ideal that cannot under any circumstances be violated. It is absolute.* Poe's rule serves to emphasize the one most important principle

of short story writing. "In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. As by such means with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction."

How well Poe lived up to his doctrine is best exemplified in his classic, "The Fall of the House of Usher." In the following extract from the long opening paragraph, for example, it is suggestive to note the number of words that definitely aid in building up the mood of the story. (These words are here printed in italics.)

During the whole of a *dull, dark,* and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the *clouds* hung *oppressively* low in the heavens, I had been passing *alone,* on horseback, through a singularly *dreary* tract of country; and at length found myself, as the *shades* of evening drew on, within view of the *melancholy* House of Usher. I know not how it was; but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of *insufferable gloom* pervaded my spirit. I say *insufferable;* for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half pleasurable, because poetic sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the *sternest* natural images of the *desolate* or *terrible.* I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the *bleak* walls—upon the *vacant eye-like* windows—upon a few *rank* sedges—and upon a few white trunks of *decayed* trees—with an *utter depression* of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the *bitter lapse* into everyday life—the *hideous* dropping off of the veil. There was an *iciness,* a *sinking,* a *sickening* of the heart—an *unredeemed dreariness*

of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think —what was it that so *unnerved* me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?

This is an artificial sort of thing. Poe laid his colors on with a heavy brush. But he got the effect that he wanted—insufferable gloom and impending dissolution. Moreover, he aroused suspense in the first paragraph by his direct statement that the narrator was unnerved when he contemplated the house.

The beginner will find it easy to imitate this story and imitation may be a good way of getting started. "Write the beginning of a story that has atmosphere" is an assignment that practically always gets results with diffident students. Poe's method is so obvious and his style is so exaggerated, that his work lends itself especially well to imitation.

Imitation as an Exercise

Imitation, of course, may be dangerous even as a practice exercise. It is recommended only for those who are unable to get started on some particular line of their own. Unquestionably, however, it helps to develop a sense of structure and a technique, and if enough different types of writing are copied, there is little danger involved. Maupassant has often been successfully copied by students. Two of his most famous stories, "The Necklace" and "The Piece of String," have served as models for many beginners who used the same material and plot structure in present-day American settings. Some of the more subtle writers,

such as Katherine Mansfield or Edith Wharton, should also be used as models if one is going in for this sort of literary exercise.

A Succession of Scenes

The importance of setting the mood definitely at the beginning of a story has been illustrated in many great plays. Eugene O'Neill secured the atmosphere he desired in advance even of the lifting of the curtain in "The Emperor Jones," where the beating of drums, rhythmic tom-toms, gives the audience the feeling of stark, elemental savagery. Somerset Maugham managed to get the effect of sultry, tropical weather and of heavy, sensuous mood, at the beginning of "Rain."

The same sort of thing can be done with the short story, which is much more closely related to the drama than to the novel. The study of plays is highly profitable to the writer. The short story is primarily a *succession of scenes* and the author must visualize his scenes in much the same way as does the dramatist. He has the problem of focusing the attention of his reader upon the theme, or main idea, and retaining it until the tale is finished.

What the scenes are to be, depends upon the main effect that is to be produced. Effects fall generally into one of the following classes: either the emphasis of some *theme,* or underlying idea; or of some of the main story elements such as *character, atmosphere,* or *plot* (the complication, or the twisting up of threads).

Poe's "Ligeia," for instance, is a "theme" story—the theme being the idea expressed in the quotation

which Poe gives from the seventeenth century philosopher, Joseph Glanvill:

> And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigour? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.

Of course, Poe has a powerful plot in this story; still, it belongs definitely in the group of theme stories. "The Cask of Amontillado," on the other hand, even though Poe seems to set out to prove that revenge is complete only when the avenger makes himself known as such and himself escapes punishment, is really a story dominated by plot interest. It is so superbly unified, however, and the different elements are so well-balanced that it rather defies classification. Poe's "Gold Bug" is a better example of pure plot interest. Wilbur Daniel Steele's "Six Dollars" (see page 195) has keen plot interest, but depends primarily upon character interest. Galsworthy's "Quality" (see page 225) depends both upon thematic and character interest. Maupassant's "Moonlight" (see page 275) and Mary E. Wilkins' "The Village Singer" are frankly stories of character.

Integration

The ideal story for most readers is one that *integrates* or pulls together all factors—theme, characters, complication, atmosphere. Steele's outstanding success is undoubtedly due to the fact that he achieves all four objectives in a close-knit, unified whole as completely

as any American writer today. Edith Wharton achieved this in her long short story, "Ethan Frome," which is undoubtedly her masterpiece. This story of a man who is chained to a complaining, chronic-invalid wife, and who falls in love with a cousin that comes to live with them, is told with haunting vividness and sense of impending tragedy that absolutely integrates setting, mood, character, and complication. Its striking climax and its aftermath of stark, horrible realism—when the lover's attempted suicide ends only in the making of a second querulous invalid, have a dramatic power that can hardly be surpassed; and it is the power that comes from perfect unification of story elements.

Stories generally emphasize some one of the four factors that are inevitably a part of any story—which factor it is depends upon the temperament of the author and, if he is practically or commercially minded, upon his idea of what the editors want. Readers today, judging from the stories published in our innumerable periodicals, can be divided into three classes: those interested in mystery and adventure (complication); those interested in character analysis; and those interested in theme or significance. The latter group would include the cultivated who read the work of such masters as Conrad and Galsworthy, and the crude and unimaginative who are interested apparently only in sex—sex no matter how hackneyed and stereotyped.

To summarize: The short story is an elastic literary medium suited to the expression of any sort of material involving narrative drama that has single effect. The single effect is all-important. It is primarily emotional. A discussion of the narrative drama part of our definition will follow in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II

WHAT MAKES A NARRATIVE DRAMATIC?

What do we mean when we say that a story or play is "dramatic"? Any group of students asked this question will give a half-dozen halting answers: "It has suspense"; "It has action"; "It has climax." These ideas are all correct so far as they go. Perhaps no definition can be found which is entirely satisfactory. The essence of the dramatic resists analysis or limitation, though countless analysts from Aristotle down to William Archer have tried to define it. A class of adult students will respond almost as a unit to a really dramatic story, and yet no individual will be able to explain just what the word "dramatic" means. Even the inspired writer cannot put his understanding into words. But he has the instinct for the dramatic. He *feels* it even if he cannot define it. And indeed, those most gifted souls who "have it in them," as the phrase goes, need not bother too much with analysis. But for the majority of students a discussion of the elements that make for dramatic power is both helpful and necessary.

Suspense Is One Element

Suspense is a form of nervous tension, and nervous tension is a state of aliveness and interest. Here is a situation in which our hero finds himself; he is in a hole, how can he get out of it? His next move may

only complicate his situation and get him in deeper. Or he may get half-way out and some external happening may block his progress. Perhaps he wants something desperately—a woman, an honor, a career, freedom, money. Some peculiar circumstance seems to offer a way to get it. But it involves other people and their happiness and rights. Shall he take this means? And if he does, how will he and other people react to the new situation? What will they say and do? Often we know the outcome of the probable action, but the suspense lies in our curiosity as to how people will take what happens to them. In Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," for instance, we know that the hero survives his terrible experience because he himself tells the story. But we want to know just what was the form of his torture and how he finally escaped.

The play that makes us sit on the edge of our seats has this quality of tension. We are excited and lifted out of our dull routine and given a thrill. In our curiosity as to how they will act and what will happen to them, we live the lives of the characters, suffering and enjoying with them.

Methods of Rousing Suspense

But what *makes* us feel suspense? It is roused by implication or suggestion. And, if the author is wise, he does this in the first paragraph or two. He implies that something interesting is going to happen. Some unusual events are impending. The difference between a story which possesses the quality of suspense in the beginning and one which lacks it, is evident in a comparison of two such stories as "The Seashore Drama" by Balzac and "Nephele" by Algernon Blackwood.

Balzac begins:

Young men almost always have a pair of compasses with which they delight to measure the future; when their will is in accord with the size of the angle which they make, the world is theirs. But this phenomenon of moral life takes place only at a certain age. That age, which in the case of all men comes between the years of twenty-two and twenty-eight, is the age of noble thoughts, the age of first conceptions, because it is the age of unbounded desires, the age at which one doubts nothing; he who talks of doubt speaks of impotence. After that age, which passes as quickly as the season for sowing, comes the age of execution. There are in a certain sense two youths: they are blended, in men whom nature has favored, and who, like Caesar, Newton, and Bonaparte, are the greatest among men.

The dramatic weakness of this beginning is clear. There is not an atom of suspense or implication. For all the reader can guess, he is about to read a biological or psychological essay. It is exposition, rather than narration.

How much more effective are Blackwood's paragraphs in "Nephele":[1]

The change of atmosphere at Carsholt began probably soon after Sir Mark's discovery of the Roman cinerary urn that very morning, but the discordant element in the castle household was not noticeable until Lady Shute betrayed her jealousy with the remark: "It's that interfering girl again! Why in the world should she go digging about the grounds like this?" Her eyes were questioning; her lips became very thin. "Above all, what possessed her to do it *now*?"

Her husband, the famous archeologist, a stern-faced el-

[1] By permission, from *Tongues of Fire,* by Algernon Blackwood. Copyright by E. P. Dutton & Company.

derly man, with an expression, evidently habitual, of great concentration yet aloofness, replied without looking up at first. The mouth was kindly, even tender, though it wore no smile at the moment.

Here is direct reference to a "discordant element," a jealous woman, an "interfering girl," and a husband who answers "without looking up at first." The main line of conflict has been suggested, with some placing of characters and some delineation. The whole beginning has been pulled together, or integrated, dramatically in such a way as to arouse curiosity.

A more obvious purpose of arousing suspense is evident in Sherwood Anderson's first paragraph in "The Man's Story":[2]

> During his trial for murder and later, after he had been cleared through the confession of that queer little bald chap with the nervous hands, I watched him, fascinated by his continued effort to make something understood.

Anderson startles us with a beginning which is really the end of a drama. But this fact in no way lessens our interest: quite the opposite. We know that a man has been tried for murder and that he has not been able to make himself understood. Probably this inability accounts for the drama. What is its cause; what personality traits have involved him in such trouble? Anderson has, with the utmost brevity, aroused interest.

Beware the "Automatic Solution"

What sort of situation arouses interest? Speaking in terms of psychology, the interesting situation is the

[2] Sherwood Anderson, *Horses and Men,* B. W. Huebsch.

one that is *"thought-provoking."* And the thought-provoking situation is one "from which our instincts and our established habits do not automatically deliver us." Here, as Pitkin says, is a "new critical weapon which cleanly cuts the fit from the unfit material in artistic fiction."

By applying this criterion the student whose plot seems good yet lacks interest, can often see that its lack is due to the fact that the solution used is automatic. The solution that first pops into the mind is generally automatic. One should always beware of such a solution. It is automatic and generally obvious because it has been used too many times.

The automatic solution comes from the author's indulgence in too much cheap reading and the consequent formation of a composite mental image in which a "typical girl" acts in a typical situation involving a "typical man." Such characters and situations always lack reality and are the product, not of close observation and experience, but of reading and imitation No editor who is worth his salt wants that sort of product. The only kind of story that really interests discriminating readers is one that has in it some elements of reality—either a challenge to thought in the initial situation, or keenness of observation, or the charm that comes from an author's personality and his attitude toward life.

A Fresh Turn for an Old Situation

Take for instance, the time-worn Cinderella motif. A young girl who is waitress at a restaurant serves a cup of coffee to a handsome young scion of nobility.

He is her ideal of romance; she is pretty and she smiles at him; she is also "different" in some way and he "gets a date" with her. Is this an interesting situation, or is it one from which there is an obvious automatic ending? Well, it will have an automatic ending nine times out of ten. But one particular beginner who started a story with such a situation saved it at the outset by creating a vivid character in the heroine, a pert, snappy little person interesting in herself. Then the student writer was artist enough to give the story a fairly original twist by making the cheap little heroine realize, on the brink of her conquest of the hero, as she is invited to dine at his magnificent home with his sophisticated mother, that she does not belong in his world. She is so bored by the conversation about books and operas which mean nothing to her, that she suddenly realizes the truth and flees from an elegance which is beyond her power of enjoyment. This is the device of *reversal of situation*—one that has been used from the earliest beginnings of the short story down to O. Henry. It is most effective, as Frances Newman has pointed out in her keenly analytical volume "The Short Story's Mutations." The automatic solution for our Cinderella story would have been to have led the lovers through an artificial, cooked-up maze of obstacles and finally have let them marry and live happily ever after; or following the Cinderella pattern, to have let some disaster remove the hero and leave a weeping heroine. Ultimately, the weeping heroine would console herself with another lover; or she might discover some fault in her aristocratic lover which would make her cast him aside for one more worthy. A number of equally obvious patterns can be conjured up when

one starts with an initial situation such as this. Any one of them *may* prove successful if handled with sufficiently brilliant characterization and style; but it takes an artist to deal with material that, through long fictional usage, has become hackneyed and trite. The author of this particular story gave it significance by bringing out the truth that our democratic civilization has somewhat overlooked—that essential differences of race, breeding and environment are in themselves often a definite obstacle to love.

Avoid Mere "Pattern Thinking"

If the writer is to get away from the automatic ending he must avoid all *pattern thinking*. He must develop his ability to see things for himself in his own way and to express them in his own way. He must also arouse and satisfy his reader's curiosity or his emotions. If he can do both things in the same story, all the better.

Action in a Crisis

One arouses interest and stirs the feelings of others by dealing with fundamental human emotions. Certain urges, certain desires are basic with all mankind. Fear, hate, rage, love and a group of related emotions such as jealousy, pity, greed, revenge, pugnacity, loneliness and ambition are at the very core of life. They have always been, as nearly as we can learn, the emotions that were involved in man's conduct. They have always constituted the motive power which impels man's action. These desires and emotions bring about complication and crisis. They conflict with

each other, they force the hero to act. *Action in a crisis* is the *essential requirement of the drama.* Without action and without crisis, there is no drama. A man acting in a hostile environment which but for a stroke of fate might be the reader's environment, is interesting. Or a man involved in a mesh of threatening circumstances which might also be the reader's circumstances, is interesting. And if what the man does or what happens to him illuminates life for the reader, the story has attained the meaning and significance which is the aim of artistic creation. Try the experiment of describing your own conduct in some crisis of your life and then see what meaning you can attach to the experience. You may find you have a short story.

Problems Must Be Real

Interesting conduct is conduct dealing with desires and *problems that are basic and real.* The reader resents triviality and it is useless to build up an elaborate structure dealing with some such insignificant conduct as that involved in a college sorority initiation or the acquisition of a fur coat, unless the initiation or the fur coat become symbols of some elemental motivating force. Of course a story dealing with a girl's desire to enter a sorority in order that she might keep her feeling of equality, or her self-confidence, might be made interesting for the adult mind by the author who understands the power of the much-talked-of inferiority complex.

Universality of Appeal

The common fears, desires, loves, hates, with an infinite variety of shadings, make up the subject-matter

of fiction. Certain qualities men have in common and hence certain stimuli, to use the psychological phrase, have universal appeal. Maupassant's greatness is chiefly due to the fact that his characters and his situations are universal. The story of "The Necklace" might be equally true of any American woman today or of any French woman or Russian woman of fifty years ago. It is based upon the desire to be beautiful and attractive. Any normal woman might act as Madame Loisel did when she borrowed a necklace to go to a ball; any woman might hurry away in order that her shabby coat might escape observation and might in her haste lose the necklace; and if she were proud or feared the owner's displeasure, any woman might replace it without confession and spend ten years of her life slaving to pay the debt only to find at the end that it was paste.

Write What You Really Know and Feel

It is one of the ironies of authorship that people seldom write directly and plainly of the things about which they feel the strongest emotions. Beginners usually skirt all around them but do it so cautiously that they get only weakly conventional stories. The fear of being melodramatic is responsible for the failure of many a story; the fear of revealing one's inner self is responsible for still more weakness. You should try the experiment of writing sometimes of the things nearest your heart and writing all that you feel about them. You may have a sense of inferiority in looks. Is that the thing that you write of? Probably not, yet it may be your most ever-present handicap, the

source of much emotional and social conflict. You feel sex attraction, do you write about the amazing effects it has upon conduct and character? Seldom—and then not until you have "arrived" and have so secure a position in the world as to dare challenge convention. Beginners seldom dare. Yet the sex motive, however it may be romanticized or disguised, is probably second only to one other motive in life—hunger, or self-preservation. It is intimately entangled with the four wishes, the fundamental desires for new experience, mastery, recognition and response. If sex and love appear at all in the work of most beginners, it is only in the weaker, more conventional aspects, rather than with the elemental vital situations. As Uzzell has pointed out,[3] very few women will tell what they know about emotions. "The conventionalities win out." The result is a distinct loss to fiction; yet good models are readily available in the life histories of ill-adapted people, as they appear in the case studies of social workers.

Sex—Heredity—Making a Living

We are rapidly becoming educated on the psychology of mental and emotional conflict. The language of Freud permeates our everyday conversation. The college freshman uses such hitherto unknown terms as "inferiority complex" and "sublimation." The "Oedipus complex" has entered our tea-table conversation. There is nothing new in this interest in emotional conflict, especially as related to sex. It appeared hundreds

[3] Thomas H. Uzzell, *Narrative Technique,* Harcourt, Brace & Co.

of years ago in Greek literature; it runs through Boccaccio's stories frankly; and through the romantic and Victorian periods less frankly. Today, thanks to Freud and the rest of the psychologists and sociologists, we are cognizant in a matter-of-fact, scientific way, of the fact that sex motives and manifestations in their complexities have a very important relationship to the whole of life.

Sherwood Anderson writes in his "Notebook":

> Consider the tantalizing difference in the quality of work produced by two men. In the first we get at times an almost overwhelming sense of proficiency in his craft. The writer, we feel, knows form, knows construction, knows words. How he slings the words about. Almost every one of his lines is quotable. And this other fellow. His words do not cling, his art forms become at times shapeless, he stumbles, going crudely and awkwardly forward.
>
> And how breathlessly we follow. What is he doing that he holds us so tightly? What is the secret of our love of him, even in the midst of the universal adventure.
>
> He is revealing himself to us. See how shamelessly and boldly he is trying to tell us of the thing that is a never-ceasing marvel to him—the march of his own life, the complete story of his own adventure in the midst of the universal adventure.[4]

How stupid it is to clutter up the world with books dealing with the superficialities of life, when all human beings have vital and personal problems which must be faced daily. We all have to earn a living, for instance; why not write about the struggle that earning it involves—about the other desires that have to be crushed

[4] Sherwood Anderson, *Notebook,* Boni and Liveright. Quoted by permission of the publishers.

—the desire of city people to enjoy the country, the desire of the artist for leisure to write or paint or what-not, the desire of the mother to be with her child who needs her, when necessity takes her to the factory? Then there are struggles that have to do with heredity. Wilbur Daniel Steele has written a brilliant novel entitled "Meat" dealing with the effect on a happy normal family of the birth of a subnormal child that has inherited great weaknesses of character. The family is nearly wrecked by the mother's insane instinct to protect this child at all costs. Steele has handled in this story a vital, human, family problem and he has not been afraid to say what he thinks about it. The fiction writer who dodges issues, skirts around the edge of great emotions, and is afraid of what people will think of his ideas, is not much tolerated, for he cannot possibly move his readers or satisfy their curiosity.

Ferdinand Brunetière has said:[5]

> Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict with the mysterious powers of natural forces which limit and belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage, there to struggle against fatality, against social law, against one of his fellow men, against himself, if need be, against the ambitions, the interests, the prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those who surround him.

Conflict is the most important single element of the dramatic narrative. The will may be opposed by Fate, as in Bjornson's "The Father"; by social law, as in "Six Dollars," where the struggle is also a struggle against two forces in the same man; by a fellow man,

[5] Quotation by William Archer, from *Études Critiques,* VII, 207.

as in "The Cask of Amontillado"; or by another force in himself as in "Moonlight." The struggle in Galsworthy's "Quality" and in his "Evolution,"[6] is a struggle for existence—against hunger itself.

Conflict of Duties

The conflict of duties is a terrible form of conflict. It produces most intolerable situations. Your love for your son pulls in one direction; for your lover in another. What shall you do? In Hardy's "The Son's Veto" the mother sacrificed herself and her lover. The conflict of loves or duties is the very essence of tragedy, because any solution, however wise, involves sacrifice and suffering. No automatic solution is possible, unless one is willing to resort to the device of killing off one or the other characters which is often unsatisfactory.

Other types of conflict are less marked. There are realistic writers whose tales seem to involve little clash of wills or desires. But actually there is struggle or obstacle. On the surface one sees, perhaps, little dramatic action in Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House" (see page 185) but underneath there is conflict: conflict between simple childish humanity and the artificial snobbery of adults. The poignancy of childish desires and the sublimity of childish acquiescence in an unfair universe are dramatic in themselves.

Ruth Suckow has written a delightful story, "The Little Girl From Town," in which there is little ob-

[6] John Galsworthy, *The Inn of Tranquillity,* Charles Scribner's Sons.

vious conflict. A child comes to the country for a brief stay and immediately people whom she visits show their sense of her personality in their efforts to please her. She is brilliantly portrayed in her childish pretty-little-girl power. The farm children show her their treasures and their animal pets which she views as thrilling and wonderful. As she is about to leave, a calf is led up to be taken to town in the guest's automobile for slaughter. She bursts into tears and throws her arms around the calf.

"Oh, no!" Patricia was suddenly wild with crying. They all stood back, shocked, never expecting such a storm as this. "Oh, no! The little calf isn't going to be killed. I won't. I won't!"

Everyone is embarrassed and shamefaced before the child's pity and her horror. They abandon their plan and she goes on without the calf. Then, for a moment, they face each other with the guilt that she has made them feel. Mrs. Sieverson has suggested that maybe they had better sell the other calf. Mr. Sieverson looks at her and seems to "want to assent." Then he cries, "Oh, no! We can't do that. This is the one we'd picked on."

He looked angry, and yet in his light blue eyes under the shock of lightish hair there was a hurt, puzzled look. "Oh, well," he muttered. "Folks can't be foolish? If ever folks were to start thinking of *such* things . . ."[7]

And he goes forward resolutely and puts the rope around the calf's neck.

Ruth Suckow has almost deliberately minimized

[7] Quoted by permission of the author. Published in *Harper's Magazine*, 1927.

struggle in this story; and yet it is there—first, the conflict of personalities, unique here because the heroine is so young; and later, the conflict of the ideas and emotions that she has aroused. To some readers this story has no plot and "gets nowhere." To others it is entirely satisfactory in its charming character delineation and its fidelity to life.

The majority of readers, however, seem to prefer something with more definitely marked conflict: struggle with ghosts, criminals, lovers and rivals, religions and what-not. The important thing, no matter how slight or how simple the subject-matter, is that the conflict be *essentially real.* How trivial is the conflict in the many stories based on some trumped-up superficiality! The girl who quarrels with her lover through long pages simply because he has once loved another woman! Nothing but the stubbornness or the stupidity of the unreal characters prevents their reconciliation on page one, because they have no inherent struggle and their environment and personalities provide none.

Vital Conflict Grips the Reader

How vital, on the other hand, is the struggle in a story like "Six Dollars" where a character is in deep, elemental conflict both with himself and with society; his feeling for a girl who is physically and (we realize ultimately) perhaps spiritually attractive to him, wars with the ideal that society has imposed on him. He struggles with an age-old conflict. If he is to be a prominent banker he must marry in his own class and must live a respectable monogamous life. He

thinks he has conquered his feeling for Donna. But it overcomes him the first night that he spends with his bride in their new house, as he looks out of the window and sees Donna's light. His wife's coldness and calculating superficiality, her inability to understand him, serve to intensify his struggle and the light becomes a powerful symbol. The elemental real man, the subconscious as well as the conscious man, will out. And Snow's desertion of his guests who come to offer him honor and a career, to find out why the light is out, is the acme of dramatic climax, perfectly consistent with the man's make-up. The final revelation about the lamp is a master stroke—the sort of tragic irony that forms a perfect plot solution, or dénouement.

Repeating the Struggle

Conflict must not only be vital; it should also be cumulative, piled up. Desire conquered once has a certain amount of dramatic interest; conquered a second time, it has more; conquered a third time, still more. Temptation, overcome only to be repeated and overcome again, gains intensity and power. The hero has gotten through one crisis; will he be stronger or weaker for the next? Has he gained spiritual power, as the idealists would like to believe? Or has his resistance been lowered, as the realists sometimes contend? By taking one's hero through a *succession of related events, all having the same basic conflict,* the reader is ultimately convinced—of his ability to resist or of his weakness. This matter of repetition of conflict will be discussed further in the chapter on plot.

It is sufficient here merely to point out the fact that one way of achieving dramatic power is the repetition of conflict.

To Summarize: The dramatic defies definition but it is generally thought of as involving suspense. We gain suspense through the use of suggestion and implication of interesting action to come. An interesting situation is one that is "thought-provoking." Such a situation involves an appeal to fundamental human emotions, desires strong enough to create crises in man's life and force him to act. Action in a crisis is the absolute essential of the short story. The conflict may take any one of a number of forms, but it must be real and it must be handled in a vital way. The more universal and fundamental the desires dealt with, the better. Intensity of dramatic interest is gained through the use of the same desire in several related conflicts all involving the same general situation. The next chapter deals with this matter of events, or plot.

CHAPTER III

PLOT

We have seen that critics differ as to the amount of plot necessary for a story, and that one group believes in a minimum of complication. But, whatever the ideal, a story must have some structure—this structure we shall call "plot." Plot is the skeleton which must be clothed with living flesh. It carries the *main philosophical idea,* or theme. For instance, the theme in Kipling's "Beyond the Pale" is clearly stated in the opening, "A man should, whatever happens, keep to his own caste, race, and breed." The plot that conveys this idea is built up of Trejago's meeting with Bisesa; his falling in love; his continued meetings and his double life; the climax when he returns to find her with her hands cut off; the attack of the dagger; and the aftermath in which we learn that he has tried and has failed to find Bisesa, and that he "pays his calls regularly and is reckoned as a very decent sort of man. There is nothing peculiar about him, except a slight stiffness, caused by a riding strain in the right leg."

Plot vs. Theme

Daudet's "Death of the Dauphin" is built around the theme, the idea of the democracy of death, as is Poe's "Masque of the Red Death." The plot of

Daudet's story consists in the little episodes which make the child realize that his royalty is of no use to him when he comes to enter heaven. Poe treated the same theme more dramatically and less beautifully when he had the prince shut himself up with his friends in order to escape the plague that was raging in the land. He built up the scene for a climax in an elaborately gay ball which was dramatically invaded at midnight by the spectral figure of the Red Death claiming the prince himself.

> He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

This is melodramatic but effective.

Parental love has been the theme of countless tales. Bjornson chooses the sort of events that depict it as an ennobling thing; Maupassant as a fierce, destructive thing. Bjornson's father's suffering leads him to a crisis in which he reaches the height of spiritual renunciation. Maupassant's mother's suffering leads her to a crisis in which she burns to death the sons of four other women.

A Test of Plot

For some of us the word "plot" calls up the image of a high school blackboard upon which the teacher has diagrammed a Shakespearean play. There is a

sort of mountain range, the peaks of which represent events or minor crises, leading up to the highest peak of all—the crisis. It serves well enough; plot is a series of lesser events leading up to some one dramatic moment in which the hero faces and acts in a definite crisis. Plot is often defined as a winding up, a twisting or an entanglement.

That sort of analysis is only superficial, however—mechanical. Pitkin's discussion of plot is far more useful as a means of determining the validity of events. He says, "A plot is a series of climactic events each of which both determines and is determined by the characters involved." This definition emphasizes the fact that events must either grow out of the characters, or influence the characters. Plot involves interaction between characters and events. This definition is vitally important for the writer of short stories. It gives him a sure test. The beginner is tempted to put in many incidents which the rigid application of this rule will eliminate. A vast number of things may happen to the heroine which seem interesting to the writer; but unless they have this close relationship to the determination of character or grow out of character, they do not belong. Events themselves, unrelated to character, may be the bone and sinew of slap-stick movie comedy, but they have no place in the short story, which insists upon a relationship between cause and effect; which demands, as does any work of art, *integration.* That is to say, all parts of the story should be firmly coordinated or pulled together. Interaction of events and characters means integration, unification, and ultimately, intensification.

Limitations of the "True to Life" Ideal

Adherence to this ideal will save you from two perils: the effort to present everything that relates to the character and its life; and the use of material just because it pleases you. The short story does not permit a full description of all the character traits, nor of an entire life or family history. Use the events selected because they produce a single dramatic effect; not for their historical but for their artistic value. It is not the whole truth of life or of a character that one tries to depict, but the significant event or events. Life itself, as a whole, is too chaotic and unorganized to be artistically impressive. For this reason the "true to life" ideal is as dangerous as it is important. One can be true, in a short story, only to a *small segment* of life. Repeatedly, the suggestion that a student eliminate some event in a story, brings the triumphant defense, "But it happened that way!" For instance, I may be greatly interested in the events of my heroine's career as a business woman, but I may not put them into her life story when the main issue is a matter of a clash of desires between the man and the woman over some domestic or social matter. The business career is one story; the relations of husband and wife in regard to their love life, their play, or their friends are other stories.

The Use of Chance

"But," you say, "what of chance? Luck enters into all human destiny." Certainly it does; and luck may enter into and does enter into the most closely integrated stories. In "The Cask of Amontillado"

chance brings the narrator his opportunity when he meets Fortunato all dressed up in motley, his wits befuddled by drink, in exactly the condition that will make him an easy victim. In "The Father" it is chance that takes the son's life; in "Government Goat" [1] it is chance that puts the goat stranded on the rocks at the critical moment of suicide. Chance enters into these lives just as it enters into your life and mine. You turn east instead of west, and meet the friend who at that moment is looking for a man to take a good position in his business organization. Your appearance at this moment reminds him of you; you get the position and out of this encounter comes your life-long career. Or you may meet the matron who has been disappointed by a dinner guest; she needs another man. She invites you "on the spur of the moment," and you meet your future wife. In themselves such events are not the proper subject-matter of fiction, but combined with character they are its very essence. What you *do* with your new position, how you react to the temptation to speculate with your employer's money; how you meet the situations growing out of your wife's faithlessness or her too great devotion—these reactions are the warp and woof of fiction. Fate has played her card and you move next; she will probably play other cards before you are through with your drama. It is what you do with them and not the cards themselves that makes your story interesting.

The introduction of chance at a critical moment, however, is dangerous. It has the effect of weaken-

[1] By Susan Glaspell, *Pictorial Review*, 1919.

ing the resulting action. It puts emphasis in the *wrong place* for dramatic value. After all, it is character that is significant. Events are subsidiary. And pure chance ought not to enter into the final solution. That final solution must be the outcome of thought on the part of the characters involved, else the lives lose meaning. Sometimes chance may seem to the superficial reader to have solved the problem; but if the story is a real story, the action of characters will always be the crowning event—even if they do no more than accept a situation. *Acceptance, recognition*—are dramatic.

Be Careful About Coincidence

Much has been said about the use of coincidence in plot: how far one may go with it. Coincidence happens in life, why not in fiction? The answer is simply that fiction must be *more* true than life. Life *is* stranger than fiction dare be. In life we must accept coincidence and we call it luck, or fate, or destiny, or what-not. But if we are confronted with coincidence in fiction we say that the author has manufactured it for his own ends and we reject it accordingly.

If we must use coincidence in a story it is best to disarm the reader. The obvious device of *admitting* lack of plausibility has been resorted to by many good writers. "You may believe it or not, but this is what actually happened," is the beginning of countless tales. Kipling thus disarms the reader in "The Rescue of Pluffles,"[2] for instance:

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[2] Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills,* Doubleday, Doran & Co.

Mrs. Hauksbee was sometimes nice to her own sex. Here is a story to prove this; and you can believe just as much as ever you please.

And again, in "False Dawn":

No man will ever know the exact truth of this story, though women may sometimes whisper it to one another after a dance, when they are putting up their hair for the night and comparing lists of victims. A man, of course, cannot assist at these functions. So the tale must be told from the outside —in the dark—all wrong.

Fitz-James O'Brien uses it in his mystery story, "What Was IT? A Mystery":[3]

It is, I confess, with considerable diffidence, that I approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary and unheard-of a character that I am quite prepared to meet an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn.

The Power of Expectation

In dealing with the improbable the writer can make use of the *influence of expectation.* The power of expectation is very great, as psychologists have found in their laboratory experiments. If you lead me to think that by touching a wire I am going to receive an electrical shock, I will jump when I touch a "dead" wire. I may even testify in all good faith that I have "been shocked." This tendency to look ahead and expect something and then to find the thing that we expect is responsible for many phenomena of conduct. Doctors well know the danger of suggesting symptoms

[3] Quoted from *Modern Short Stories,* collection by Margaret Ashmun. Copyright, 1914, by The Macmillan Company.

to patients; lawyers know how witnesses can be influenced by suggestion. The fact of expectation is thus a valuable tool for the fiction writer; by it he may lead his reader to believe in some improbability—a ghost, for instance.

To Summarize: The plot is the structure on which the story is built. It carries the theme, or main idea. It can be defined as a "series of climactic events each of which both determines and is determined by the characters involved." Adherence to this ideal saves the writer from the peril of including irrelevant material. Chance and coincidence may be used, but only in so far as they can be related to character traits and action.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE DO AUTHORS GET THEIR PLOTS?

Where does one get the idea for a story? Do plots flash full-blown into the minds of authors? Most writers testify that the plot grows from a tiny seed. Newspaper paragraphs have served to start many a story. For the creative spirit a mere suggestion is enough. The author's imagination leaps forward or backward from a given episode and a series of related events and character revelations is the result. A notebook, as discussed on page 66, is one of the best devices for keeping fleeting plot ideas.

How Edna Ferber Got a Plot

Edna Ferber[1] tells how she got the idea of the story that she herself considers her best, "The Gay Old Dog," from a newspaper account of the tearing down of an old family hotel in the Chicago Loop. The reporter had played up the "Waif of the Loop," a sporty old bachelor who was made homeless by the tearing down of the hotel. That was all, but it started Miss Ferber to thinking: why had the waif not married; what responsibilities had kept him from having a

[1] In *My Story That I Like Best,* Ray Long, editor, International Magazine Co.

home? Thus she worked out the tragedy of the man whose early youth was sacrificed to the necessity for keeping a roof over his sisters' heads. The girl he loved grew tired of waiting for him, and married another man. His sisters married and had families of their own. He grew prosperous and more and more lonely. His sisters found him a bore and he was unwelcome in their homes and he finally sought companionship in questionable company. His sisters resented his friends and feared for their effect on prospects of young lady daughters. Finally he revolted against their cruel callousness and against the mercenariness of his mistress. The last paragraph pictures him sitting alone in his luxurious apartment, after he has hung up the receiver "on" the woman whose sordid soul he has suddenly seen. It was this paragraph that Miss Ferber saw before she wrote her first line. The whole story thus grew from the simple suggestion that a "gay old bachelor" was lonely and homeless.

O'Neill's Plots

The germ for O'Neill's play, "The Hairy Ape," was the episode of a stoker's leaping overboard from a ship on which the playwright was a passenger. The stoker hero in his play is a symbol of man's inability to orient himself either as beast or man. O'Neill got the idea of "The Emperor Jones" from a story told him by an old circus man, about the President of Hayti who had said that they would never get him with a lead bullet for he could get himself with a silver one. A year elapsed for O'Neill and one day reading of the

Congo and a native feast accompanied by the rhythmic beating of drums, he was suddenly struck by the power of a combination of the silver bullet idea with the effect of tropical forest on the primitive imaginative mind.

In both these plays O'Neill used scraps of experience that would have slipped past any mind less eager and imaginative. And once caught by an idea, he was able to dig deep into the souls of his characters and to grip his audiences with the portrayal of their struggles and their tragedies. It is interesting to know that O'Neill read much of Kipling, London, and Conrad[2] in his youth; and that he had a young-manhood of adventure as a "hand" on a cattle ship that sailed many waters; that he later lived among outcasts of the lowest sort; and that he finally became tubercular, as an amazing number of literary geniuses have been, and was sent to a sanitarium where he did his first really serious writing.

A Lizard Suggests a Plot

Rita Weiman, writing in *Liberty*,[3] tells of how she built up a story from an idea she got watching a little green lizard that kept always in the sun, crawling bit by bit away from the shadows. The lizard reminded her of the sort of women that "want only to bask in the sunlight of luxury, refusing to face the problems and the issues of life, not realizing that the shadows are bound to overtake them sooner or later." From this beginning she wrote "The Lizard" which

[2] Barret Clark, *Modern American Writers,* McBride.
[3] September, 1927.

was published six months later. She also tells how the famous Molyneux trial for murder aroused her interest in motives so that she later wrote a story and a play based on her suppositions as to the wife's conduct. Under what circumstances would a wife testify to her husband's innocence when she knew he was guilty? What would be her attitude toward him after he was freed?

Questions of this sort arise in the great majority of murder cases. The interest of the readers who grasp so eagerly for the latest reports from courtrooms is not entirely morbid; human beings have acted strangely, violating social, moral, and legal codes. What made them do it? What last straw broke the camel's back? What elements in early home and social environment account, perhaps, for the warping of characters that seem fairly or even unusually attractive up to the moment of sudden madness? These questions and hundreds of other questions arise when crime is committed; and they have an almost universal interest. People are disgusted by the crime, but they are curious about underlying causes and motives. They could not be otherwise in an age which is preeminently scientific; an age which regards any kind of human behavior as *explainable.*

To Summarize: One gets plot ideas from a thousand and one sources: from his own inner consciousness, his fleeting impressions, even his dreams. The writer must constantly search his own soul for the things that are in it that have meaning and significance. He must reflect on his own experience and the

events of each day; the minor and the major crises of his life. The logical place to look for plots that one can handle well is in the things that one *knows best;* the people one knows; the situations one knows. It is well to keep a notebook of situations and plot ideas.

CHAPTER V

LINES OF STRUGGLE

Having found an idea for a plot how shall you develop it? The simplest type of plot is that based on an incident. Maupassant's "Moonlight," such a story, is a good one for the beginner to study. The priest has been told that his niece has a lover; he is furious; he goes forth with a cudgel; the moonlight disarms him; he wonders why God made moonlight; he sees the lovers, "a living answer to his question." Here is the crisis of the story—what will he do when he sees the lovers? He simply withdraws, "as if he had penetrated to a temple where he had not the right to go." Daudet's "The Death of the Dauphin" is an incident story: the little prince is dying; he asks question after question about Death, until he reaches the crisis in which he learns that he can take nothing with him, and as he turns his face to the wall he concludes, "Then being a Dauphin is just nothing at all." Try imitating these stories, placing them in a setting you know.

The Single Struggle

These stories have characterization, some struggle within the characters, and a crisis which involves only the recognition and the acceptance of truth. There is no complication because there is no secondary line of interest or struggle. A single line of action helps the

writer to get a sense of structure and climax, at the same time that it enables him more easily to achieve the first aim of the short story—a single vivid impression.

A slightly more complicated structure is that of Jack London's "To Build a Fire." It involves a series of struggles on the part of a man traveling with a dog over Alaskan snows when it is fifty degrees below zero. The story is merely an incident, elaborated by the use of a series of highly suggestive intimations of disaster. The man was "quick and alert in the things of life, but only the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all." He plunged on, with the dog at his heels. The dog knew that it was no time for traveling. "Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man's judgment."

Here we have the theme of the story which London simply elaborates in a series of minor mishaps and struggles, each of which has an increasingly sinister portent. The man's struggle is solitary all the way through, uncomplicated by any factor except the forces of nature which conspire to bring about the final tragedy of his freezing to death. The dog enters in only as a wiser creature, and he finally trots off to fire and shelter, leaving his comrade's dead body in the snow. This story illustrates the great power that can be achieved by a single line of struggle, provided the author knows the art of arousing suspense.

In the hands of an amateur this story might have been merely a shall-I-or-shall-I-not sort of thing—

mental debate pure and simple. In London's story the forces of nature were always opposed to the hero, and he had a definite line of struggle against a series of situations which forced him to *act*. Instead of sitting and thinking, he always forged ahead; always tried some new expedient, as his hands stiffened. London thus gave us a vivid series of scenes.

A Succession of Scenes

The importance of always viewing the short story as a succession of scenes can hardly be overestimated. The author must realize that to a very large extent he is handling the materials of the dramatist. And a play in which a character simply sat and thought aloud would not get very far with any audience. We may have only one character but that character must *do* things.

In "La Mere Sauvage," by Maupassant, the structure is simple. A French woman has four German soldiers billeted upon her; her son is away in the war; she serves the soldiers well enough and they help her with the housework. She thinks "always of her own boy," but, because they are kind to her, she loves her four enemies. Then comes the letter saying that her son was killed by a shell which near cut him in two. She says nothing, but she entices her four enemies into the loft of her home, sets fire to it and burns them alive. When people come up and question her, she tells them all that she has done. She asks the Prussian officer to write to their mothers and say that she, "Victorie Simon, la Sauvage," did it. Then she quietly stands against the wall, waiting for them to shoot her.

After she is dead, they find the letter about her son in her hand, bathed with blood. That is all—except for the aftermath in which Maupassant explains that the Germans later destroyed a chateau by reprisal, and the narrator ruminates about the atrocious heroism of the French mother.

Using More than One Line of Struggle

"The Adoption," also by Maupassant, represents several types of struggle. A woman wishes to adopt a child; his parents love him too much to give him up, though they need the money. A greedy neighbor, however, sells her boy. He grows up and returns to visit his real parents. He is seen by the young man whose parents refused to sell him. And this young man turns upon his devoted mother, berating her for cheating him of his chance to be rich. He goes angrily away, more completely lost to his parents than is the boy whose parents sold him into riches. Here are definitely separated struggles. How did Maupassant manage to give the story unity? Chiefly by telling it with fine objectivity, seeing it impersonally from start to finish as a whole. The struggles of both sets of parents are portrayed by an all-seeing eye which perceives their relation to the final ironic tragedy.

Sherwood Anderson's "I'm a Fool" has two lines of struggle. The fool "blows himself" to a seat in the grandstand. He is better dressed than usual; he attracts the attention of the man and girls in front of him—here enters the second line of action. They invite him to join them. He does so and begins to brag about the things that he does not really have. The

girl fails to realize that he is lying and seems to be interested in him. They go for a boat ride; and the fool and the girl sit together on the beach. And as the party finally breaks up, she shows that she expects the affair to go on. He is to write. But he knows that he cannot go on—he is not what he has pretended to be. And he repeats over and over, at the end, "I am a fool." The main struggle is in the boy; he dominates; the story is told entirely from his angle, viewed through his consciousness. But there is a slight secondary line, in the girl's response to the situation—she is interested in the boy. And because she is interested, she creates the possibility of a slight entanglement and climax. Never for one moment, however, does her line of interest become dominant. She is always a minor character, serving to prove to the hero that he is a fool.

As Blanche Colton Williams has said,[1] O. Henry's story, "The Gift of the Magi," is an excellent illustration of the use of two distinct lines of interest and struggle. Della, a much-loved wife who possesses beautiful hair, decides to sell her hair in order to buy her husband a fob for his beautiful watch. She, after some struggle, sells her hair and buys the fob. Her husband, in turn, presents her with a beautiful comb which he has purchased with money he gets by selling his watch. The story is told from the woman's angle and the man's story is entirely subordinated. The two lines of action come together in a climax which binds them into a unified whole. This is an extreme and very clear illustration of the use of two

[1] Blanche Colton Williams, *A Handbook on Story Writing*, Dodd, Mead & Co.

lines of interest, with one greatly subordinated. Only by burying the second line until the moment of climax could O. Henry have achieved the final surprise which gave the story its particular thrill.

A much more complicated type of structure is presented in Steele's "Six Dollars." The main line of interest is Snow's struggle against his passion for Donna. A secondary line, which hinders and hampers him, is his wife's desire to have him a great man. The complication consists, not so much in this, however, as in the simple fact that Snow is married to her and that she is incapable of understanding what is happening to him and that in her stupidity she increases his fixation upon the lamp. Never for one moment does her struggle to make him famous ever become the main struggle; it is entirely subsidiary.

Struggle in the Detective Story

For still more elaborate complication we turn to the detective story. Poe's tale of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" indicates the most common type—one in which the usual order of events is reversed and the process is one of unwinding, rather than of winding. Two women have been horribly murdered and the two amateurs who have philosophized about the pleasures derived from the analytic ability, set out to solve the mystery. They examine the neighborhood, they examine all the evidence. They are impressed by the unusual horror of the crime, and the peculiar quality of a voice heard by natives of various lands, none of whom could understand the words spoken. They are impressed by the unusual activity

necessary for the feat of escaping through the window, and by the marvelous vigor that must have pulled out the patches of the hair; by the finding of a bit of hair *not human;* and by the finger marks upon the victim which indicate a hand not human. Then Dupin produces the newspaper item about an escaped orang-outang. The rest is simple.

Here is a typical unwrapping of events. It is chiefly an intellectual process that is involved for both reader and writer, quite different from the process involved in a story dealing with emotional reactions. It is a weaving together of many threads of interest and clue, only to discard those that are disproved as we go along. Complication is both the ultimate aim and the means of building up the detective story, which is quite different in its nature from other types.

The Order of Events

Miss Williams has pointed out in her chapter on story types that the natural, chronological order of events gives an ABCDEFGH sort of development down to Z. "The Father" and "Moonlight" have this order. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" has a reverse order, beginning with Z and working back to A. "The Cask of Amontillado" has another order—it begins with H and follows the action of revenge to Z, giving no inkling of the ABCDEFG that motivated the revenge.

Beginning in the Middle

"A New England Nun," by Mary E. Wilkins—still another type—begins with the middle of the love affair

between the "nun" and her lover, say at H. Louisa is carefully described as a fussy old maid, absorbed in the details of her house and her garden and the care of her dog, Caesar. She worships her "little feminine appurtenances." She has been engaged to Joe Dagget who has been away for fourteen years. She is to marry him within a month. There is a Lily Dyer who stays with Joe's mother and at whose name Joe blushes. All this is in the initial situation, H. It is easy to see that Miss Wilkins probably had in mind, when she started her story, the conflict that would arise in a woman who was a victim of fixed habits when she was confronted with the possibility of having to change her ways. The conflict is fixed habit versus romance.

Starting with such a character faced with matrimony, the author takes pains to show the full nature of the conflict. The really normal woman would not hesitate to sacrifice her "appurtenances" for the greater values of marriage to Joe. But during the fourteen years Louisa's feet "had turned into a path so narrow that there was no room for anyone at her side." Moreover, for Louisa the "wind of romance had never been more than a murmur.'" The author makes her this way purposely in order that her conduct may be consistent; in making her this way she violates no artistic law. Some women are that way.

How the Story Works Out

The story begins in the middle with H, but goes back to the engagement and explains the growth of Louisa's character in the intervening years. We have

a mildly emotional engagement and a separation involving the growth of fixed habits. That brings us back to our starting point H. The lover is back, the marriage is impending. Louisa thinks of Joe's mother, who is a domineering old woman who will be a second disturbing element in her life. Joe will blunder over her clean floors and interfere with Caesar's régime. His mother will dictate. Here is conflict. But Louisa has expected for fourteen years to marry Joe and he is expecting to marry her and it is not for her to prove untrue and break his heart. At this point we need some sort of outside event to spur Louisa to action, if we are going to show her running true to character in a crisis. The action moves on from H to the eavesdropping scene, Q. The author introduced a love scene between Joe and Lily and made Louisa an involuntary witness. They confess their love and mutually agree that Joe must marry Louisa. How does Louisa react to this revelation? She *reflects:*

> Louisa sat there in a daze, listening to their retreating steps. After a while she got up and slunk softly home herself. The next day she did her housework methodically: that was as much a matter of course as breathing; but she did not sew on her wedding clothes. She sat at her window and meditated. . . . She could hardly believe that she had heard aright, and that she would not do Joe a terrible injury should she break her troth-plight.[2]

Then comes a *decision:*

> She wanted to sound him without betraying too soon her own inclinations in the matter.

[2] Reprinted from collection, *A New England Nun*, by Mary E. Wilkins, by permission of the publishers, Harper and Brothers.

Then comes action:

She never mentioned Lily Dyer. She simply said that while she had no cause for complaint against him, she had lived so long in one way that she shrank from making a change.[3]

But we still need something more; or at least the author thought we needed it, for she adds a paragraph of information about how Louisa *felt* the next day. That night she "wept a little, she hardly knew why; but the next morning on waking she felt like a queen who, after fearing lest her domain be wrested away from her, sees it firmly insured in her possession." Now she can keep Caesar's little hut as she wishes, sew linen seams, distil roses in peace. Then the *author comments,* "If she had sold her birthright, she did not know it. Serenity and placid narrowness had become to her as the birthright itself." The story has run swiftly through from H to Z and the story ends with a significant act and a clearly enunciated theme. The theme is, by the way, wholly in line with what psychologists have said about the atrophy of unused emotions.

Plot Events Depend on the Impression

What the author did with this story was, of course, determined by her initial idea. She was writing as she usually does, about a typical New England character trait. She could have made Louisa a commonplace heroine, sacrificing a great love. But that was not the kind of character that interested her. She was depicting a real New England personality—Louisa who was

[3] Reprinted from collection, *A New England Nun,* by Mary E. Wilkins, by permission of the publishers, Harper and Brothers.

incapable of a great love; Louisa who was too anemic to be concerned with passion and who had put into the place of a fundamental emotion, emotion about trivial and material things. The treatment of the material is exactly right to bring out this theme. The events were few and the emphasis is upon the depiction of the outstanding traits. The story ends with a statement of the theme by the author and with a final picture of Louisa sitting peacefully "like an uncloistered nun." The plot events and the technique of handling them have been made into one unified whole that creates a vivid impression. The story could easily be imitated, with a shift of emphasis and a different use of material and events but the same use of structural form—H to A and back to Z.

The beginner can see from the foregoing analysis how a plot can be built from a given situation, or from an idea of a character trait. The process is really simple and logical. Certain steps are indispensable, however, in every short story. A detailed suggestion of these steps is given in Chapter IX in the discussion of "The Pattern of Conduct."

Cumulative Effect

The repetition of conflict is an important element in plot building. As we have indicated in Chapter II, emotional effect is increased through the repetition of conflict about the same desires, or the repetition of obstacles. Cumulation—piling up the agony—is an old device of melodrama based on a sound psychological principle. The short story writer must concern himself with unity; hence the emphasis on conflict about

the same desires. In "The Doll's House" there is repetition of conflict—the scenes at school; in "The Cask of Amontillado" there is repetition of Fortunato's resistance to accompanying his friend; in "Moonlight" there is repetition of conflict—when the priest learns of the lover, and again in the moonlight —always the same conflict; in "Six Dollars" there is repeated resistance to Snow's love for Donna and a final giving in; in "The Birthmark" there is repeated struggle between Aylmer and his wife's resistance to his cruel desire; her resistance being more implied than actually narrated. The author should always keep in mind the power of repetition of desire. Try writing a story in which the heroine repeatedly resists a desire, but eventually gives in to it.

To Summarize: A plot may be based on a single incident or on several. It should consist of a succession of scenes, the selection of the scenes and their order depending on the effect to be produced. Repetition of the conflict intensifies the emotional effect.

CHAPTER VI

AMOUNT OF COMPLICATION NECESSARY

Some structure a story must have. How much—that is the question. A definite change is coming over our ideals for the short story. As we have noted in Chapter I, there is a tendency away from elaborate structure and complication. Some of the successful writers of today have used a comparatively loose, free treatment of material. What of the new type of story?

Dorothy Brewster and Angus Burrell have said in their highly illuminating "Dead Reckonings in Fiction," [1] that Tchekhov and Katherine Mansfield offer a new literary form. That they "outrage the sanctities of the short story by rarely having either plot or climax."

One questions the accuracy of the latter statement. It all depends upon one's definition of plot. If one conceives of it as a tight, rigid pattern, involving tricks such as O. Henry loved, certainly Mansfield and Tchekhov fall far short. But if one thinks of it as interaction of events and characters involving a certain amount of crisis, then most of the stories of these writers may be said to have some plot and some climax. They have the rudiments, at least. They do not consist entirely of unrelated events and character traits,

[1] Dorothy Brewster and Angus Burrell, *Dead Reckonings in Fiction,* Longmans Green & Co.

or of action that is all on a dead level. While they minimize pattern and achieve the artistically important effect of spontaneity, they get effects that can only result from the most careful selection and shaping of events.

Katherine Mansfield's Stories

Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House," for instance, seems without structure; but it is in reality carefully worked out. She began with her ending, as recorded in her notebook. "The little lamp, I seen it." Certainly while the story seems to be an easy flowing segment of life, everything in it is directly related to the events connected with the doll's house, and the ending has the essential quality of recognition for the reader—recognition of childish character and childish acceptance of life.

Likewise "The Fly," a story that has been much discussed. Katherine Mansfield jotted down in her journal for 1918 some thoughts about a fly that had fallen in a jug of milk. In 1922 she wrote "The Fly," which embodies the ideas of her early revelation about the cruelty of God and the angels. It is already a famous story. It begins with an episode in the office of "the boss" when old Woodifield speaks of the son's grave in Belgium; and from there it goes straight through to the scene with the fly and the superbly ironic ending. The fly struggles to get out of the ink, the man reacts and out of his reaction we get glimpses of character and, perhaps, of theological truth. Katherine Mansfield does not erect a sign-post to tell where the conclusion leads and many readers see only the characterization, and the father's forgetting of his

grief. But she certainly opens up avenues of philosophical and religious speculation. The story has a succession of events, leading up to a climax which reveals character and, if you care to so interpret it, truth. There is struggle and crisis, at least so far as the fly is concerned.

Psychological Justice

One need not, however, quarrel with the authors of "Dead Reckonings" about the use of the word "rarely." One is entirely in accord with their admiration for the newer forms and with their view that "the very incompleteness of the form is to many readers a certificate that *psychological justice is being done.*" Moreover, life is truthfully portrayed. Nothing is sacrificed to make a pattern and a neat ending. It is true that "it has been the experience of not a few intelligent people devoted to Kipling, Maupassant, Stevenson, that, after reading them and subsequently thousands of stories patterned less skillfully upon them, the manner becomes more obvious than the matter."

Anyone studying the short stories of today is inclined to believe that the story of the future is going to insist on the psychology and let the mould go. As readers become more sophisticated, structure and complication will sink into the background as secondary matters—important only in so far as they carry the message that brings revelation of truth or beauty.

A New Literary Form

And here, as indicated in our opening paragraph, is the great hope for those who wish to express them-

selves in fiction and yet have been deterred by an idea that plot, in the rigid sense, is all-important. To such people, provided they have artistic insight and sufficient sense of relationships, the new type of story offers an infinite wealth of possibilities. And to others, whom the neatly compact form actually repelled, it offers a new attraction. It is a form that should lure an increasing number of talented people, people who would never be interested in an "art" that is chiefly a matter of formalism and trickery; but who are always interested in a medium of expression which concerns itself with beauty and significance.

To Summarize: The amount of complication that is necessary is a matter of individual taste, but there is a tendency at the present time toward a form of story that has little *obvious* plot, but is, of course, unified enough to produce a single dramatic effect.

CHAPTER VII

CHARACTERIZATION

A short story is an account of an important event in the life of some person; what *happened* to him, and what he *did*. You, as artist, are interested in this man, and want to put him into a story. How shall you go about it?

First of all, you must understand the character that you are going to write about; you must catch his personality and his outstanding and important traits; you must make your portrayal living and convincing; you must make your man talk naturally and act naturally; you must avoid reporting his actions and write dramatically, giving the full emotional conflict; and you must make the final action and the ending satisfactory to your reader's sense of beauty or truth. In order to do all these things you must study both the inner mental life of your character and his outer life as related to other people.

Know Your Characters

It would seem almost axiomatic that the writer must know his characters thoroughly before he attempts to interest other people in them. Yet many amateurs fail to have even a bowing acquaintance with the beings who are to move through their stories and who must be living, breathing realities. The typical, ready-made character is an abomination. Dismissing

a man with the remark that he is "a typical traveling man" conjures up a composite traveling man, one who has no individuality of his own. However commonplace the author may wish to make his traveling man seem, he may not use the word "typical." He must use, instead, the details about this particular man which make him stand out even in his commonplaceness. The real character goes beyond type. In other words, *avoid generalities.* The avoidance of generalities and the substitution of concrete details is a fundamental law in all writing that has for its purpose the creation of an illusion of reality.

Avoiding the Ready-Made

The achievement of reality in characters is the author's first necessity, unless he writes stories of the mystery or detective variety. Even there, characterization may be highly important. And such reality one gains only by the use of accurate detail. Reality has nothing to do with the wooden figures who parade through many an amateur's manuscript as a "handsome blonde," a "successful banker," or a "reckless cow-boy." No matter how fluently a story is written, it simply does not get over when its people are automatons of this sort. The author has in his mind only a sort of composite image, an image built up through much cheap reading, or much visiting of commonplace movies.

Reality is, perhaps, best of all obtained by drawing deeply on your own inner self. How would *I* feel in this girl's place? How do I feel when I see my mother suffer? When a man I do not love proposes to me?

When I meet the man I love with another woman and realize his interest in her? Try to dig out of your own memory the exact feelings of such moments and you will find a surprising amount of realistic detail stored away. Material gained in this way has not only fidelity to life, but it has elements of originality.

Experience of Life

Failure to know your characters is the result sometimes of lack of experience. Now experience is a matter that is only in part controlled by the individual. While it can be deliberately acquired, it is to a large extent determined by factors outside yourself. It comes chiefly through struggle and suffering. You must be willing to suffer if you are to know and report life. Our Conrads, Londons, and O'Neills have ventured much and struggled greatly. They met experience with wide open arms and they paid the price. For them there was no comfortable sitting in a space bounded by four walls. They went forth into the wide world of adventure and encountered many different kinds of people.

The newspaper reporter gets valuable experience in the round of his daily routine, which brings him into all sorts of situations and shows him human beings acting in all sorts of crises. Many women writers have gained their power through the keenest emotional suffering. The more widely one opens his arms to the adventures of life, the more he sees of life in its infinite variety of forms, the more he *has* to pass on to his readers. That goes without saying. But it is a truism that seems to be overlooked by a good many

would-be authors who expect to spin great literature from a horizon bounded by four walls in a city room.

Insight May Be Enough

By this one does not mean to say that the only way to write good fiction is literally to go sailing on the high seas. Narrowness of experience is a handicap, but it is not insuperable. It is conceivable that an invalid who never leaves her room might write illuminatingly of the people about her. Many invalids have produced great literature through making the most of what they had in the way of experience and insight. Robert Louis Stevenson did some of his best work as an invalid. Katherine Mansfield did her best writing when she was suffering from tuberculosis, leading a closely restricted life. She wrote about the people in her childhood and the people of her present—the landlady, the maid, her fellow boarders, and the people whom she encountered in the doctor's office. Above all, she put herself into her stories—her *deepest emotional experiences.*

Observation

The most serious cause of failure to understand your characters is lack of observation. This can be easily corrected. The power of close observation can be developed and made a habit by anyone who will go about it systematically.

Keep a Notebook

The writer who is always on the look-out for details of personality—the significant mannerisms, the

outstanding traits, the revealing words—will not find himself lacking in material. Being on the alert, he will, if he is wise, keep a notebook or a small card file. He will record not only his fleeting thoughts, philosophical conclusions, and plot ideas, but also his observations about the people he meets. Many famous writers have kept notebooks; indeed, probably most authors of any importance have some method of catching and recording impressions. The notebook should contain the sort of character detail and episodic material that can later be used to start a story or to vivify some trait or some moment.

In making entries in the notebook the author should use his best powers of expression, should strive for exactly the right word or phrase. Max Eastman has spoken of "the shadowy haste of a grey cat" and "a white horse that looked as if he had been used to scratch matches on," as perfect phrases. They are perfect because they are vivid and unique. They set the cat and horse apart as individuals. Katherine Mansfield's "Journal" is significant. She records, for instance:

> Roddie on his bike in the evening, with his hands in his pockets, doing marvels by that dark tree in the corner of May Street.[1]

Who cannot see Roddie as she put him in "The Weak Heart"? And who cannot see the daughter of the watchsmith? The notebook describes her:

> Her piano-playing. Her weak heart, queer face, queer voice, awful clothes. The violets in their garden. Her little mother and father.[1]

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[1] Reprinted from Katherine Mansfield's *Journal*, by and with the permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publisher.

Likewise Katherine Mansfield carefully puts down her impressions of "The Little Cat."

> Here he used to sit and sometimes on the path below there sat a small white and yellow cat with a tiny flattened face. It sat very still and its little peaked shadow lay beside it.
>
> This little cat never ran straight. It wound its way along the path, skirting the tufts of grass, crept now by the fence, now by the side of a rubbish-heap, and its little paws seemed afraid of being followed,—traced.[1]

Such description as this comes only as the result of watching cats. It is perfect cat-conduct. And it makes any fictional cat as real as the cat on your fence or mine.

Hawthorne's Notebooks

In Hawthorne's American Notebooks, we find such items as the following: "To well consider the characters of a family of persons in a certain condition,—in poverty, for instance,—and endeavor to judge how an altered condition would affect the character of each." "A woman to sympathize with all emotions, but to have none of her own." "Suppose a married couple fondly attached to one another, and to think that they lived solely for one another; then it to be found out that they were divorced or might separate if they chose. What would be the effect?"

Hawthorne had here, in these notes, the bases of several stories, stories dealing primarily with character traits and situations that would involve action that was significant. Why do not you, reader, try

[1] Reprinted from Katherine Mansfield's *Journal,* by and with the permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publisher.

writing stories based on Hawthorne's notes? A woman who could sympathize with the emotions of other people but have none of her own would be an unusual personality; a Freud would have a wonderful time analyzing her and he might, eventually, be able to make her really experience emotion. What sort of event or situation might bring about such a change of character? Experiment and see what you can make out of the idea.

The Distinctive Trait

Someone has said that unusual forces brought to bear upon unusual personalities are required to make a good short story; that the novel may deal with colorless people, but the short story needs vivid characters. Generally speaking, this is true. But commonplace people become interesting when we discover their distinctive traits. Each human being is different in some peculiar way from others, if only in the nature of his drabness. Each human life has its dramatic aspects. It is the writer's business to see *how* people are different and how their peculiarities affect their lives.

We have noted in our earlier discussion that the short story is built, as a rule, about some outstanding character trait. This trait is intimately bound up with what happens. The greatest care in selection of character details is required in order that this unity of character and plot may be achieved. Consequently, *only those traits should be emphasized which either advance the story, or help us to understand the character* as it acts and reacts. The advancement of the story is the more important structurally, but the understand-

ing of the character is important as a means of arousing the reader's sympathy and belief in the story. Extreme caution must be used, however, in introducing traits for this secondary purpose of explanation of character, lest they detract from the unity or slow down the dramatic interest.

We have seen that the short story deals only with a segment of life and the revelation of that moment or group of moments. Having certain characteristics, our hero reacts in certain ways. Life is a series of adaptations to situations and he will rise or fall in so far as he can adapt himself; he will interest the reader chiefly in so far as he reacts in a way that is highly characteristic, or that is illuminating for the reader as a fellow human being.

Effective Use of the Distinctive Trait

Thyra Samter Winslow's "Mamie Carpenter" is the story of a girl who had one asset, her looks, and of how she got what she wanted by making the most of them and of her wits.

> Mamie Carpenter was twenty-one. She could have passed for eighteen; she knew it and when meeting new acquaintances, she often did. She was small and had blonde hair, not white and faded looking, but real blonde, which needed only an occasional touching up with peroxide to be a lovely gleaming mass of gold.[2]

Tchekhov's *Olenka* in "the Darling" is an outstanding figure because she is the embodiment of a trait

[2] Reprinted from *Picture Frames,* by Thyra Samter Winslow, by and with the permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf. Inc., authorized publishers.

that is common in the most feminine type of woman; she must always be loving somebody and her love is her whole life; she has no opinions outside the opinions of her beloved; she has no interests outside his interests. Galsworthy's Mr. Gessler in "Quality" is another memorable figure, with his leathery skin, his yellow crinkly face and crinkly reddish hair and beard, and the folds slanting down his cheeks to the corners of his mouth and his guttural and one-toned voice. Mr. Gessler himself suggests leather; his religion is the production of good "boods" and he starves rather than make poor ones. He represents the domination of devotion to an ideal. Both of these characters are portrayed with the closest adherence to the principle of emphasis on a single trait. Steele's Donna, for all her uncouthness, is a figure that stands out in high relief—she is the epitome of an elemental type of simple devotion.

Willie, in Roark Bradford's "Child of God," [3] is outstanding partially because his story is remarkably faithful to negro religion, but primarily because of his amazing acceptance of injustice, his magnanimity to those who are his enemies. Mary E. Wilkins' women in "The New England Nun" and "The Village Singer" are outstanding characters built around the traits that dominate their story action. The one is a personality dominated by the meticulous care of material possessions and observance of trivial customs. The other is dominated by her own one source of superiority, her

[3] O. Henry, *Memorial Prize Stories, 1927,* Doubleday, Doran Co. O'Brien, *The Best Short Stories of 1927,* Dodd, Mead & Co.

voice; her jealousy of her rival is entirely in relation to voice.

These stories, picked at random from out of the multitudes that have close interaction between a single character trait and plot, serve to illustrate the sort of trait that can be used effectively. Different traits have varying degrees of interest inherently. One writes, just as one reads, about the sort of people that interest him most. The point that is important for the student of writing is that the selection of a character trait for emphasis is dependent upon the whole aim of the story—the single effect to be achieved. It is inseparable from plot and from the other story elements—angle, setting, and atmosphere.

Make a series of personality sketches in which you emphasize the outstanding traits of people whom you have seen or known. Such sketches often turn out to have good plot germs within them.

To Summarize: The writer must know his characters thoroughly in order to make them vivid and real. He must avoid the wooden or ready-made. He must develop his power of observation and must learn to pick out the distinctive trait. The habit of keeping a notebook is a valuable one.

CHAPTER VIII

DEPICTING CHARACTER AND HANDLING CONVERSATION

Having selected the outstanding traits, you are next confronted by the problem of how to depict them. By what means can you best show character?

There is, of course, direct narration—the sort of thing that says, "Willie was an ignorant, superstitious negro, highly religious and steeped in Biblical lore which he took literally. His outstanding trait was the way in which he lived up to the injunction to forgive others their sins." This method of showing character is legitimate and it has been used by the greatest writers. It is the method which Galsworthy used in the paragraph quoted earlier about Mr. Gessler's appearance. It enters into the narration of most stories in one way or another. But it is not the most effective method.

Let the Actions Speak

The dictum that actions speak louder than words is particularly true in fiction writing. Character is usually more effectively portrayed by action than by direct description. Willie Roark's dying vision of a snow white chariot, Gabriel, the angels, St. Peter, and the Great Lord God are infinitely more revealing than any description could be. They represent his character translated into terms of mental action. So also do his

dying words, "Makes me love ev'ybody." This is the absolutely convincing act, the supreme act.

This is the method of portraying the trait through the action of the character itself. One may also use the indirect method, portraying it through the action or thought or words of another character. What our friends and acquaintances think of us is highly significant. What they *do* about us is far more so. The first few paragraphs of Martha Ostenso's "Wild Geese" inspire fear long before the father is directly introduced. His family show their terror in a variety of little ways so that the reader is prepared for his sinister brutality which becomes quickly evident when he enters. In Susan Glaspell's story, "A Jury of Her Peers," we never directly meet the heroine who is lodged in jail pending the inquest on her husband's death. But we gain a never-to-be-forgotten picture of her through the words of her neighbors and the acts which they attribute to her.

Implying Character

This art of implication is the highest technical art that the writer can possess. It marks definitely the difference between obviousness which is generally the mark of the beginner, and subtlety which is the mark of the master of technique. Conrad's "The End of the Tether" illustrates this principle. Conrad does not tell us outright that Captain Whalley is blind. He merely gives a succession of hints and lets the pitifulness of the old man's plight grow upon us by degrees.

Captain Whalley's muscular hands squeezed the iron rail with an extraordinary force and the perspiration fell from

under his hat and in a faint voice he murmured, "Steady her, Serang—when she is on the proper bearing."

The reader does not know that the old man has lost his eyesight, but he gets an intimation of it through the Captain's unusual conduct. He is a brave man, why should he grip the rail and perspire when guiding his ship? Why should he add faintly, "steady her *when she is on the proper bearing,*" and why should he murmur "without relaxing the set severity of his features," "'How near now, Serang?'" And then change his tone and give an order in a "loud firm voice"?

We see that the old man is playing a part. He is concealing something, and that something is his reliance upon Serang. The superiority of suggestion over a blunt, direct statement that the Captain has lost his eyesight is quite clear.

The Subtlety of Browning

Browning was the great master of implication and for that reason the fiction writer will do well to study his dramatic monologues. In his poem "My Last Duchess," for instance, he lets a husband's colossal vanity and possessiveness speak for themselves in everything that the Duke says as he shows his guest the dead wife's portrait. The merest fragments of sentence serve to reveal her character, the Duke's character, and the tragedy that ensued. "Since none puts by the curtain I have drawn for you, but I"—implies the man's sense of possession as does the later phrase: "Sir, 'twas not her husband's presence only, called

that spot of joy into the Duchess' cheek." "She had a heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad," reveals his jealous ugliness. So does: "My favor at her breast, the dropping of the daylight in the West, the bough of cherries some officious fool broke in the orchard for her, the white mule she rode with around the terrace—all and each would draw from her alike the approving speech, or blush, at least." Thus, by showing the kind of things which bring down the Duke's disapproval, Browning shows us both the wife's character and the Duke's. He shows character and advances the plot action through the use of the same details.

This use of dialogue is one of the most common devices for revealing character. It has the great advantage of dramatic economy. Try a short story written in monologue as Browning wrote "My Last Duchess." The method can be most effective. A recent magazine contained an amusing and yet revealing story narrated as the stream of thought of a girl waiting for her lover to telephone her.

Managing Conversation

Few beginners know how to make conversation seem real, how to observe the principle of naturalness—which, if overdone, often involves talk that gets nowhere—and economy, which forwards the movement or action. It is difficult to steer a proper course because life itself is unorganized and lacking in focus, while fiction demands organization and focus. Conversation is effective only when it is natural and at the same time carefully selected with a view to the im-

pression to be created. Perhaps the best way for the beginner to handle this problem is to first write down the conversation that he thinks would take place in real life and later to go through this conversation and blue-pencil all that is irrelevant to the main action.

"The Killers" is included in the present collection because of the masterly way in which it tells a story through conversation. Direct description is reduced to a minimum. Maupassant attains the same economy of material in both "The Necklace" and "The Piece of String" but neither of these stories touches "The Killers" for reality and suspense. From the standpoint of material they are greater stories. They reveal life more completely, but, dramatically speaking, they are inferior.

Studying Actual Talk

The beginner can profit by a careful study of the conversation in the stories included in this book. He should note the naturalness of the conversation in "The Killers"—its simple everyday-ness. It is commonplace lunchcounter talk, but talk that is guided by the author so that it carries on the drama. There is no stiff "unhand me villain" sort of talk, no "My God" melodrama. All of the characters are calm with the terrible calmness of a great crisis, a life-and-death situation. In his restraint lies Hemingway's power. The outstanding quality of the great actress Duse's work was a similar restraint—in the tragic moment of her lover's final departure, she simply walked to a window and looked out. Stilted, melodramatic talk and conduct are the common fault of inexperienced writers. The

fault is most effectively remedied through the honest criticism of instructor or adviser, pointing out specific places where the characters talk unnaturally. The student working alone, however, though he misses this helpful criticism, can do much to remedy his defects by conscientiously studying conversation as reported by the greatest of contemporary writers. It does not do to study only the authors who wrote years and years ago and wrote the language of their own times; one must study writers of today.

The conversation of one's comrades, as well as that of the people one passes on the street, or overhears in street-cars or stores, is all grist for the mill. What, for instance, does the stenographer in a middle western office know about the life of an opulent motion picture actress in California? It is significant that the young milliner who was studying in a university extension class in Indianapolis failed when she tried to write about a California heroine and succeeded when she wrote of the girl who came into her own shop to buy a wedding veil.

Some Don'ts

Among the other "don'ts" that the author must heed is the injunction against putting his own speech habits into the mouths of characters who would have different habits. If I am a slangy person I must watch that I do not put slang into the dialogue of my prim, old-maid teacher. On the other hand, if I am writing about a vulgar little high school flapper, I must avoid the school-ma'am's diction.

Another hindrance to the reality of dialogue is the

use of sentences and long monologues that are too perfectly composed, too well rounded off. The talk of everyday life, even in the most correct circles, is fragmentary. People do not always finish their sentences, by any means. Even the best-mannered will interrupt each other, especially in moments of great interest or excitement. The greater the emotional crisis, the shorter the sentence. There is not a long sentence in "The Killers." Yet it has a remarkable ring of reality.

Handling the "Saids"

The constant use of "saids" is another mark of amateurishness. "Saids" may become very tiresome to the reader, and for that reason it is well to substitute some equivalent. But the equivalent also has its dangers, the dangers of unnaturalness and overemphasis. How many times a day does the manuscript critic have to underline such ridiculous phrases as "she hissed," "panted he," "she sneered," "she tremulously murmured," "laughed he," "grinned he"! While the author frequently has to cast about to find some equivalent of "said," he very often does so quite unnecessarily. The best conversation is so characteristic of the people talking that the reader can guess who each speaker is by the things he says. The use of "saids" and their equivalents is minimized by the master storyteller.

And when it is necessary to tell the reader who is talking, it is often best to do it by the use of some sentence that contains no equivalent of "said" at all. For instance, in Ruth Suckow's "Little Girl From

Town," as the little girl reaches the farm, "Mr. and Mrs. Sieverson didn't know quite what to say." [1]

"There she is. This is the first time this little girl has ever been out to a farm. What do you think of that, Marvin?"

Marvin grinned, and backed off a few steps.

"Yes, sir! But she and Uncle Dave have great times driving round together, don't they?"

The little girl looked up at him and smiled and nodded her head with a subtle hint of mischief.

"You bet we do! We have great times."

And again later:

Patricia gave a little cry. Her face bloomed into brightness.

"Oh! Do you have a kitty?"

"A cat! Gee!" They all laughed. "*One* cat! I bet we got seventeen."

"Really seventeen kitties? Did your father buy them all for you?"

"Buy them!" The boys shouted with laughter. "Gee, you don't buy cats!"

"Oh, you do," Patricia told them, shocked. "They cost twenty-five dollars, the kitties that sit in the window in the shop."

The charm and naturalness of this conversation is quite obvious. It makes the action, moreover, perfectly clear.

To Summarize: Character is best portrayed through action or implication. Conversation must, above all, be natural. It must either advance the plot action or serve to reveal the character; preferably it

[1] *Harper's Magazine,* 1927. Quoted by permission of the author.

does both at the same time. The author should refrain from using speech habits that do not belong to the particular type of character portrayed; he should also refrain from the use of sentences and monologues that are unnaturally long or too well-rounded. The use of too many "saids" is bad, but the substitution of inappropriate equivalents for them is worse. The best conversation is that which is so characteristic of the people talking that there is no necessity for further identification.

CHAPTER IX

THE THREE STAGES OF ACTION

All stories, from the simplest episode type such as "Moonlight," to the more complicated type such as "Six Dollars," have a basic pattern which represents three stages of human conduct. The pattern is as follows: The man finds himself in a situation which presents a problem. The problem consists of some sort of conflict of desires or needs. He thinks over his situation and tries to solve the problem. His planning involves thought and reason. Having weighed the reasons for and against a given line of action, he comes to a decision and acts. What he does, or fails to do, is what we rather loosely call his character.

Dramatic action, therefore, always involves these three mental stages: *grasping the situation, thinking about it,* and *acting.* The author can no more avoid depicting these phases of conduct than he can write without paper. They are the warp and woof of behavior. Each stage must be given its proper emphasis. The failure to give this emphasis often means that the ensuing action is not understood by the reader, or that the dramatic possibilities of the story are wasted.

The Pattern of Conduct

Consider, for instance, the phases of conduct in "Moonlight":

FIRST STAGE: (*The situation*)

The initial situation is that of the priest who hates the tenderness of women and rejects love. He has found that his niece, who he intends shall become a nun, has a lover. Here is his problem. What shall he do about it.

SECOND STAGE: (*Reflection*)

After a period of "dreadful emotion" and a good deal of reflecting, he tries to read a little but he only grows angrier and angrier. He cuts himself while shaving and all day is swollen with rage. He tries to read but cannot concentrate his attention.

THIRD STAGE: (*Action*)

He starts out, oaken club in hand, into the night. Presumably he is going to kill the lover.

What happens now? He has completed the three phases of conduct. Do we have a finished story? No. We want to know what happens next.

NEW FIRST STAGE: (*Situation*)

The moonlight surprises him with all its splendor and moves him deeply. He observes the phenomena of nature and his unusual piety is further aroused. He thinks about the possible meaning of moonlight. A *new problem* arises: why has God made it? He is confronted by a doubt, a vague uneasiness. The new situation of moonlight, the sublime spectacle of nature, may have religious significance. His scientifically organized mind must find an explanation for this

	miracle. Then along come the lovers. The moment has arrived for him to carry out the action upon which he has determined. But his new reflections about the moonlight bring doubt and he is irresolute.
SECOND NEW STAGE: (*Reflection*)	He stands still as the lovers approach. He *thinks* of love stories of the Bible. God seems, in the Bible, to approve of love. He surrounds it with moonlight tonight. Is it possible that he, the priest, has made a mistake?
THIRD NEW STAGE: (*Action*)	He feels as if he has penetrated to a temple where he has no right to go, and he flees.

Thus, in this simple story, Maupassant takes his hero through two rounds of the three-phase cycle of action: situation, thought, action. If his plot were more complicated, as is Steele's "Six Dollars," he would take his hero through these phases several times, increasing the conflict in each new situation and each new decision and action.

The First Stage: Grasping the Situation

This stage is the initial situation or generating circumstances of a story. In "Six Dollars" it is the statement about Snow's conflict. He is to be a banker and a banker must lead a respectable life, but there is something about Donna that attracts him; what is he going to do about it? In "The Killers" the boy, George, is confronted by two bullies who are threaten-

ing him in some veiled way; what is he going to do about them? In Maupassant's "The Adoption" the visitors wish to adopt the child of a poor peasant couple; will the parents sell the child?

Sometimes this first stage requires considerable elaboration. In "Moonlight" and in "The Birthmark" the reader needs to be given a very accurate description of the characters involved and the main traits and hence a good deal of detail is used as direct character description. At other times, the initial situation requires little exposition; it is clear in itself and the reader is almost immediately taken to the second stage —that of thought.

The Second Stage: Thinking About It

The period in which the hero reflects upon his problem is all-important and demands psychological insight and careful analysis. Here, what is called the "angle of narration" enters in (see Chapter XI); and here many beginners go astray in depicting the stream of consciousness. The reader must learn, through the depiction of the period of reflection, what goes on in the hero's mind, *what his motives are.* Motives are all-important; they constitute the final basis of judgment, in the court of fiction as in the law courts. The hero may decide, as did Susan Glaspell's hero in his crisis on the rocks,[1] that it is his duty to commit suicide. But unless we know what his mental processes have been, what pros and cons he has weighed, we can neither understand his action, nor get the full emotional response from it.

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[1] *Government Goat,* O'Brien Best Short Stories, 1919.

If Maupassant had given us a cursory statement that the priest was influenced by the moonlight, we should not have understood the sudden change of action on the part of his hero and the story would have fallen flat. But he took great pains to show the objects that stimulated the priest's imagination—the odors, sights, and sounds—and then he showed just how the priest slowly built up, out of his reflections, a new decision which led to a right-about-face.

Steele shows his hero's conflicting desires and his reasoning in "Six Dollars." "There was something behind Donna's dullness that made a fellow stop and look again"; yet he could not understand why he should want to have anything to do with her. He had every day "to be a decent man and wear a clean conscience; otherwise the pointing finger of the banking business would find him out." "It would be awkward telling the girl." He meets her and, rationalizing (finding reasons for his weakness), he keeps postponing telling her: he cannot tell her at the first turn of the shore on account of the surf; or as they first start inland, on account of the wind. And when he gets to the thorn tree—there is Donna. There his earlier resolutions melt away and he says only the things that "will come from a man's mouth as if it were someone else speaking"; things he doesn't mean at all.

A bald newspaper report of this part of the story would say that Snow was in love with a girl who was not respectable and he decided to break off the affair, that he set off in a boat to meet her and tell her; but when he reached his rendezvous with her, he once more fell victim to his desire for her and so went away without breaking his news. But how undra-

matic this sort of direct narration is compared with the living reality of Steele's art, which shows us the emotional struggle of the hero, his reasons for his decision, and his human inability to carry them out when he is with the girl.

The reader will note that in both "Moonlight" and "Six Dollars" careful attention is given to the depiction of *alternating* thoughts and emotions. Emotions are that way, they rise and fall in cycles; they run in opposites; hope and despair; love and hate; fear and courage; loneliness and self-sufficiency; remorse and self-justification. These alternations occur in all emotional situations.

Each Event Must Have Reality

Sometimes writers fail to make use of this sort of detail and consequently attain a baldly reportorial style because they do not realize the importance of slowing down and giving the details leading to decision and action. They have been taught that there is virtue in brevity, in compression. Yet there is no virtue in brevity at the expense of reality. The same oversight is the cause of failure to make important moments vivid and compelling. Every short story is a series of minor events leading up to a major event or crisis and ending in significant action. Each event, whether minor or major, must be depicted in its full reality. With this sort of realistic portrayal the writer who is weak in plot-making ability may still write effectively. Without it he fails, no matter how elaborate and striking his plot may be.

Says Mrs. Wharton, in "The Writing of Fiction":

Nothing but deep familiarity with his subject will protect the short story writer from the danger of contenting himself with a mere sketch of the episode selected. The temptation to do so is all the greater because some critics in their resentment against the dense and the prolix, have tended to overestimate the tenuous and tight and the result is a loss in dimension and richness.[2]

This observation is very true, as a study of the work of even such a master as Maupassant shows. His speed and brevity do involve a loss in depth. In "The Necklace," for example, he slips rapidly through scenes that might have been made much more compelling emotionally—the scenes immediately following the discovery of the loss of the necklace. Consider what lies behind the following bald statements:

She waited all day, in the same condition of mad fear before this terrible calamity.

Loisel returned at night with a hollow, pale face; he had discovered nothing.

"You must write your friend," said he, "that you have broken the clasp of the necklace and that you are having it mended. That will give us time to look around."

She wrote at his dictation.

At the end of the week they had lost all hope. And Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must consider how to replace that ornament."

It is perhaps paradoxical that for all its speed mania, and its high competition for the attention of fiction readers, our age nevertheless requires a more slowly moving story. It is primarily interested in the

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[2] Quoted from *The Writing of Fiction,* by permission of the publishers. Charles Scribner's Sons.

causes of human conduct and it is willing to study mental processes. The poverty of Maupassant's method in "The Necklace" is brought out when one contrasts the story with the work of some writer whose techinque is more leisurely and whose use of detail is more copious.

James Stephens, for instance, can wring the greatest possible intensity out of a moment. He has a terrific power of concentration; he almost hypnotizes the reader. In his story "Hunger," for instance:

> And her husband had no work! Almost he had even given up looking for work. He would go out of the house and come into the house and go out of the house again; and he and she would look at each other in a dumb questioning.
>
> It was strange how he had arranged with himself not to look at the children. How he had even arranged that their whimperings should seem to be inaudible, and their very presences invisible! And they, having raked his coming as with search-lights, and discovering that he brought nothing, looked at him no more.
>
> They looked at her. They projected themselves to her, about her, upon her, into her ——
>
> A wolf mother, thus badgered and possessed, would have escaped from her young by mercifully or unmercifully slaughtering them. But she could still preserve her soul, her tenderness. Yet, if a whole infinity of tenderness seemed to be preserved for the children, a major, a yet more marvellous, tenderness was reserved for her man—it was without words, without action. It was without anything whatever. It was itself alone. Unproven, unquestioned, unending. To be perceived, received, only by the soul, and from the soul, or not to be received or perceived at all.
>
> Sometimes she would say—not that she had anything to

say, but to ease her husband's heart with a comradely word—

"Any chance to-day, do you think?"

And he would reply:

"Chance!"

And he would sit down to brood upon that lapsing word.

They were not angry; they had not the blood to be angry with; for to be wrathful you must be well fed or you must be drunk.[3]

This description of the feelings and behavior of a man and woman who are seeing their children starve is absolutely gripping. Stephens has sunk his very consciousness in their consciousness. The result is a dramatic intensity that makes the average narration seem superficial and inadequaute. It is one thing to narrate a story, telling what happened and why, and quite another thing to live the story and make your reader live it.

Reporting vs. Dramatic Writing

Amateurs seldom give the necessary amount of detail at critical points. They seldom do justice to the emotional intensity of the moment. Over and over again, the manuscript critic is forced to write on a student's story, "Slow down here. Let us see your characters in action. Let us see how they look and talk. Let us know what they are thinking."

The student will understand the difference between reporting and dramatic writing if he will read a newspaper account of a murder and then read Hemingway's story, "The Killers." The newspaper report gives

[3] James Stephens, *Etched in Moonlight*, Copyright, 1928, by The Macmillan Company. Reprinted by permission.

the news—the main facts of the story as they appear to outsiders; the Hemingway drama makes the reader *feel* the brutal ruthlessness of two criminals hunting a man, and that man's dull acceptance of his tragic end. The student will gain further understanding if he will take a newspaper report of some crime, let us say a grocery robbery and rewrite it, filling in from his own imagination the probable details of action and conversation, keeping Hemingway's technique in mind.

Dramatic rendering of a given situation demands of the writer a deep concentration. Hasty writing is nearly always slip-shod. The experienced critic can tell exactly when a student has begun to hurry in the writing of a story; when he has written without giving full consideration to his subject-matter. Stories do not spring full-blown overnight. The germ may come that way, or the entire plot may flash in, but the working out of scenes and details is a matter of thorough absorption in the story. Mrs. Wharton has spoken authoritatively on this subject:

> Again and again the novelist passes by the real meaning of a situation simply for lack of letting it reveal all its potentialities instead of dashing this way and that in quest of fresh effects. If, when once drawn to a subject, he would let it grow slowly in his mind instead of hunting about for arbitrary combinations of circumstance, his tale would have the warm scene and flavour of a fruit ripened in the sun instead of the insipidity of one forced in a hot house.
>
> There is a sense in which the writing of fiction may be compared to the administering of a fortune. Economy and expenditure must each bear a part in it, but they should never degenerate into parsimony or waste. True economy consists in drawing out of one's subject every drop of sig-

nificance it can give, true expenditure in devoting time, meditation and patient labour to the process of extraction and representation.

It all comes back to a question of expense: expense of time, of patience, of study, of thought, of letting hundreds of stray experiences accumulate and group themselves in the memory, till suddenly one of the number emerges and throws its sharp light on the subject which solicits you.[4]

The Third Stage: Action

The greatest difficulty the average writer encounters in characterization is probably that of getting the right solution. How does the character finally solve his problem? How does he react to what has happened? The story fails or succeeds in so far as the outcome is satisfactory to the reader; in so far as it gives him the necessary surprise, recognition, or sense of completeness. If the writer can make his hero or heroine do *exactly the right thing* as the curtain goes down, half the battle is won in advance. It is for this reason that the best stories are often *built back* from the final action or remark. Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House" was built in that way, as we have noted elsewhere—back from the concluding remark: "I seen the little lamp." Try imitating this story with a grown-up heroine or with a little-boy hero.

How does one determine just the right final action? Are there any recipes or rules? Hardly, for any ending is good that "gets over"; but there are some fundamental principles that seem to hold good. There is the *highly consistent* ending, for instance, in which

[4] Quoted from *The Writing of Fiction,* by Edith Wharton, with the permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

the character acts in a way that is uniquely characteristic of his outstanding trait. Having built a story from a single dominating trait, it is perfectly logical to end in a way that shows that trait still dominating the hero's life and the lives of others. The reader gets satisfaction in laying down his magazine and saying, "Well, she would act that way. It's perfectly consistent with that sort of character."

If you know the sure test of a coward, or a hypocrite, or a cruel man or a flirt, you can write a good story, according to Pitkin.

The Sure Test

The sure test is the test which convinces the reader that the character will always act in the way that you have indicated. He has proved himself for all time. When *Thord Overas* appeared finally before the priest and gave half of all he owned and added that he proposed to "do something better now," we know that he had reached the heights of selflessness. There was nothing more that he could do, having lost his son, but give up his wealth. When Aylmer gave his wife the liquid that was even more dangerous than the agents which had been "powerful enough to change her entire physical system," we knew that he had reached the height of his obsession and would stop at nothing; just as his wife, in her obedience and devotion, reached the heights in her drinking of the fluid. Mr. Gessler could do no more than starve for his ideal. Montresor could do nothing more cruel than wall up his enemy in a catacomb.

In Mary E. Wilkins' story, "The Village Singer,"

Candace is consistent clear through the story to the end. She has fought her rival, Alma, until she lies dying; then she gives in and asks her nephew to bring the girl in to sing for her. We think that her jealousy is at last conquered. But after the girl has sung for her the dying woman looks up and speaks—"and it was like a secondary glimpse of the old shape of a forest tree through the smoke and flame of the transfiguring fire in the instant before it falls. 'You flatted a little on—soul,' said Candace."

The Reversal Ending

Sometimes the story ends in an act of seeming inconsistency. The hero reverses himself and goes back on what he has stood for. This gives the ironic ending, an ending beloved of the Greeks and Boccaccio and Maupassant. It is the type of ending that Petronius used in "The Matron of Ephesus" and that Maupassant used in "The Necklace."

According to Frances Newman, the descendants of the Petronius story are numerous. They are based on "reversals coincident with recognition." She quotes Aristotle:

> Reversal of the Situation is a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to the law of probability or necessity. And Recognition as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. The best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of Situation, as in the Oedipus.[5]

[5] Frances Newman, *The Short Story's Mutations,* B. W. Huebsch.

A less striking form of reversal, because less ironical, is found in Susan Glaspell's "Government Goat," where the character who has been the victim of an inferiority complex suddenly becomes a superior being, a hero. The goat which has become to him a symbol of his own inferiority (because he cannot buy it for his children) becomes the symbol of his superiority (for he has saved it and has proved his courage in the act). In "Six Dollars," likewise, the money which Snow has given to Donna in payment of his "debt outstanding" has bought the lamp that became a symbol of Donna's dog-like devotion. He gave her the money in an effort to pay for love; she used it to show her faithfulness. The reader can see for himself how effective this type of ending is. It is, moreover, a surprise and constitutes a perfect direct dénouement.

Making Clear the Motives for Change

Sometimes the writer gets into difficulties in the portrayal of change in character. A heroine is started on a given line of conduct; suddenly she adopts its opposite. Well and good, if her reasons are clear to the reader. But all wrong if her motives are not sufficiently explained. Either a character must behave consistently all the way through or, if there is inconsistency, the inconsistency must be explained, or must be capable of explanation.

The behavior of Petronius' matron comes under the latter classification. The whole point to the story lies in her reversal of conduct. We accept it because it seems true to life. We know that extremes of protestation usually betoken an inner or unconscious sense

of weakness. A woman who makes an unusual demonstration of fidelity would be said by a psychologist to be "compensating" for her real inner lack of faithfulness. Moreover, propinquity and situation have a good deal to do with morality. And so most of us, whether we are using merely common "horse" sense, or are applying our knowledge of the principles of psychology, are quite willing to accept the probability of the matron's atrocious conduct. Indeed, Petronius has prepared us for it by ironic implication. The master stroke that we do not anticipate is, of course, that she will allow her husband's body to replace that of the stolen thief. Her acquiescence at this point is a final test. That touch, on the part of the author, is pure genius, the sort of inspiration that lifts the story into the realm of art.

Failure to Act May Be Significant

Sometimes the most interesting ending for a character's struggle is his *failure to act.* Inaction, if significant, may be as interesting as action. The motives that bind us and inhibit us and stifle our growth are important in the revelation of character and its relation to life. While the story must always have a *conclusive* ending, the action may consist of negation. "A New England Nun" is that type of story.

Some Ending Devices Often Used

It may be useful to consider some rather mechanical devices. The ending, as we have noted, brings the reader recognition of truth or beauty. Sometimes this revelation is sufficiently shown in the action itself.

The author tells his story and ends it with an unmistakable event. This is called the *direct dénouement.* It is the dénouement used by O. Henry when he surprises his readers in the last paragraph or last sentence. It is the ending used by Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher"—"and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed suddenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher.'" It is the ending in his "Ligeia." "Here, then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the Lady Ligeia." It is the ending in "The Necklace" when the whole ghastly futility and sacrifice is thrown at the reader in the statement that the necklace was paste. The direct ending is suitable for this type of story in which *events fully and completely* carry the idea.

But the events are sometimes not enough. Sometimes when we have reached the end of a story, as in "Beyond the Pale" with the cutting off of the girl's hands and the stabbing of her lover, we want to know how the lover took what happened; how did he go on with his life and was his story ever known to the world? This type of ending Pitkin has aptly called "the significant aftermath." The aftermath helps round off the story so that it is completely satisfactory. The main story has been told, the author has briefly added a few notes on what happened further. This is the ending used very often when the action is narrated by someone who has observed it or who has taken a minor part in the struggle. James Stephens used it in "Hunger" when a visitor at the home of the starving family breaks his tragic news and goes away.

And he went away all hot and cold; beating his hands together as he walked; and feeling upon his shoulders all the weariness and misery of the world.

It is the ending in "Quality" when the narrator learns that Gessler has starved to death.

"Yes," I said. "He made good boots."

And I turned and went out quickly for I did not want that youth to know that I could hardly see.

A third type of ending is the one that Pitkin calls the "interpretative comment." The author gives a general philosophical estimate of what has happened. Mary E. Wilkins appraises Louisa Ellis in "The New England Nun": "if she had sold her birthright, she did not know it." This ending is used, rather too much, by Hawthorne. Hawthorne could not resist the temptation to moralize. He talked about the effect of noble thoughts in "The Great Stone Face," which was obviously a moralizing tale at the outset. He talked about the futility of ambition at the end of "The Ambitious Guest," although the direct solution of the story, the final catastrophe, was moral enough without additional comment.

This ending is used with a beginning which sets the theme or philosophy. At the beginning, "This is the story of a man who did thus and so," and then at the end the comment, "Now you see what happens to men who do these things. That is the way the world is." The combination of the philosophical beginning and ending is an excellent device for emphasizing the main point of a story, especially when the plot itself is weak. It furnishes the reader with guide-posts. By thus emphasizing the theme or the moral, it diverts

attention from possible weaknesses in plot or character development. That it often helps to give a well-rounded structure and hence a sense of artistic satisfaction and of completeness, is quite obvious to anyone who carefully studies beginnings and endings.

The World Hates a Moralizer

The demarcation between a well-rounded ending with a philosophical conclusion, and a moralizing ending which any reader resents, is sometimes a thin one. It takes a fine sense of good taste and fitness to know where to draw the line. Obvious moralizing or preaching is always an inartistic thing, unless it is done with a certain note of *not caring*. Kipling repeatedly instructs his readers, but always with a sort of sophisticated, take-it-or-leave-it air which quite disarms them. "There are more ways of running a horse to suit your book than pulling his head off in the straight," he says in "The Broken-Link Handicap," and then at the end he adds, "So now you know how the Broken-Link Handicap was run and won. Of course you don't believe it." And again, in "Three And—An Extra." "After marriage arrives a reaction, sometimes a big, sometimes a little one; but it comes sooner or later, and must be tided over by both parties if they desire the rest of their lives to go with the current." This is the beginning. At the end Kipling makes Mrs. Hauksbee say, "Take my word for it, the silliest woman can manage a clever man; but it needs a very clever woman to manage a fool."

Kipling interprets life lightly and ironically for his readers. Conrad, on the other hand, interprets it

rather heavily, gropingly, hesitatingly. In "Youth," for instance, he puts his own philosophy about life into the mouth of Marlow:

"But you here—you all had something out of life: money, love—whatever one gets on shore—and, tell me, wasn't that the best time, that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks—and sometimes a chance to feel your strength—that only—what you all regret?"

And then Conrad goes on, in his own person:

And we all nodded at him: the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled; our faces marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love; our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions.[6]

This is Conrad's philosophy, in all its sincerity and its beauty. It is the mature thought of a man who has lived intensely and he offers it to the reader with a simplicity that is as moving as it is convincing.

True Interpretation

The ending is, of course, the final stamp of personality. The material that interests one and what one does with that material, the conclusions that one comes to in regard to it, are the criteria of author-

[6] Quoted from *Youth* with the permission of Doubleday, Doran & Co. and of the Trustees of the Estate of Joseph Conrad.

ship. The author's personality gets into the story in spite of him and in spite of any attitude of objectivity. As a creative artist he has his chance to portray life, not exactly as he sees it, but *as he thinks it might be*. Life itself he has to take as he finds it; fiction he makes, within certain limitations of fact, as he wants it to be. He says, "This is what I make out of life. You can make out of it what you will. But I end it this way."

To Summarize: Dramatic conduct involves three stages of action: sensing the situation; thinking about it; acting. Each of them must be treated adequately. Adequate treatment rules out the baldly reportorial method in so far as it demands that the writer give the full reality of each important moment. There are two main types of final action: the highly consistent, or the reversal. Among the ending devices used are the direct dénouement, the significant aftermath, and the philosophical conclusion.

CHAPTER X

ON STUDYING PERSONALITY SCIENTIFICALLY

If you want to gain the fullest degree of understanding of human nature, you can hardly afford to overlook the contributions of the psychologists and the social scientists—the people who are studying the very essence of personality and human nature. Great writers have always dealt with human behavior, but their understanding was limited to the things that they could themselves observe—common sense psychology, as it were. The modern writer has an advantage in that so much is now known about the formation of personality. He has at his disposal the writings of men who have observed the causes and manifestations of human conduct both in the scientific laboratory and in the medical and psychopathic clinic. He can read the reports of social workers who spend their days trying to find out why their clients are socially unadjusted—people who cannot hold jobs, cannot live with their families, cannot stay in school, cannot refrain from stealing or setting buildings on fire, or even from murder. Here is excellent material for fiction.

The Freudian Theory

The influence of Dr. Sigmund Freud upon the thought and life of our time can hardly be overesti-

mated. Wherever one goes, one hears his phraseology. His theories about inferiorities, suppressions, the mother-complex, and countless other phenomena have become the subject-matter of everyday conversation among many different classes of people. He may be "unscientific" and his theories may be built upon entirely false premises, as many psychologists of other schools assert, but they seem to explain many phases of human behavior. The fiction writer should know at least the fundamentals of Freudianism.

Everett Dean Martin, in an excellent pamphlet on "Psychology and Its Uses," sets forth briefly the Freudian theory. Dr. Freud and his followers have found, says Dr. Martin, that—

> by encouraging nervous patients to talk freely, they were able to make them remember certain unpleasant experiences which, though long forgotten, seemed still to possess them and to cause symptoms.
>
> When these forgotten experiences were recalled and their influence was explained, the symptoms frequently disappeared. Freud later found that the symptoms were, in a way, symbolic expressions of impulses which were so disguised that the patient did not recognize their significance. He used the term "repression" for this kind of forgetting and disguise. He discovered that the same unconscious preoccupation also determined his patient's dreams.
>
> According to Freud and his followers, much human behavior is determined by the "Unconscious." It is operative in religions, in art, in day dreams, in haunting fears and deep likes and dislikes, and in many little errors or everyday life. It makes up the individual's temperament and unless directed toward socially acceptable ends, may throw one out of adjustment to his environment.
>
> Psychoanalysis has met with hostile criticism because of

its reputed overemphasis on sex. But it should be said that sex does play a more determining part in human life than is conventionally admitted, also that Freud's use of the term differs from the popular meaning of the word. By the "psycho-sexual life" he means practically the entire instinctive and emotional nature.[1]

For serious study the student should go to the writings of Freud himself and of his successors. But the above brief statement suggests the possibilities of psychology as it can be related to the problems of the fiction writer in dealing with character. Freudian theories about the Oedipus or "mother-complex," for instance, yield a great deal of illumination on the subject of the mamma's boy who never grows up; the man who is tied to mother's apron strings; who constantly obtrudes his mother between himself and his wife or sweetheart. They serve to explain the reason why the weak or sensitive type of man is often attracted to the dominating woman. There is a psychological basis for the hen-pecking that the cartoons portray. The mother is everywhere the symbol of protection from an alien and harsh world, and if the adult man has been unable to detach himself from his fixation upon his mother as a child, he often develops certain character traits which are now well recognized in the psychological world. If he marries at all, he marries a dominating woman like his mother. Those traits are the very warp and woof of fiction; the situations that they involve in a world that has its own ideas of what a "he-man" should be, are essentially tragic.

[1] Everett Dean Martin, *Psychology and Its Uses*, The American Library Association, Chicago, 1926.

The Behavioristic Theories

There is a still more recent group of psychologists known as the "Behaviorists," led by John B. Watson. Their outstanding contribution that is useful to the fiction writer is the discovery that emotional conduct is, except for three basic varieties, learned or "conditioned"; and their emphasis upon a scientific method of observation. They explain conduct on the basis of reaction to environment and stimulus. They regard Freud's analysis and McDougall's instinct system as unscientific. Mr. Watson has ideas on the subject of psychology as related to literature. Writing in "The Saturday Review of Literature," he decries the avalanche of books written by novelists steeped in Freudianism and makes a plea for the author with a behavioristic background; the author who realizes that the human being is "born a squirming mass without instincts, without patterned behavior"; a mass into which, if you take it at birth, "you can build almost any kind of behavior patterns." Believing that we are environmental products, Mr. Watson contends that the author should "select his characters from real life and follow them about for six months putting down only the things that they say and do"—in other words, using more observation and less imagination.

"Psychology," says Everett Dean Martin, "has great educational value if emphasis is laid on the qualities which differentiate one man from another. Psychologists are developing an impartial and objective technique for the study of personality. I know no study more effective in leading the student along the path of sound and independent judgment. It explodes

many superstitions and prejudices. It reveals to us the stuff that many of our ideals are made of and helps us to understand when our thinking is solving problems and when it is a device for pampering ourselves and evading facts and tastes."

The Power of Symbols

The psychologists have taught us, for one thing, the power of the symbol. Its use in literature, as in religion and art, goes back to the beginnings of folklore. There are rich materials in ethnology and anthropology, in the accounts of taboo and fetishes of primitive peoples and their modern survivals. A symbol is a representation of an idea or a belief. As such it is essentially an object to worship, love, fear, or hate—a *thing* to struggle for or against. To the bootmaker in "Quality," the shoe was a symbol of perfection. To Aylmer in "The Birthmark," the blemish on his wife's face was a natural obstacle to be overcome; in overcoming it he would overcome Nature herself and thus demonstrate his superiority.

The symbol is useful dramatically because it serves to establish a *concrete object* for *struggle* or *conflict.* It often establishes a crisis. A wife may endure untold sufferings or injustices at the hands of her husband, until his attack upon something that has become a symbol sets off her revolt. In "The Revolt of Mother," Mary E. Wilkins makes a new barn the crowning representation of father's stubborn tightfistedness and indifference to the family welfare. The family needs a decent house. Father builds another barn. His grinding thrift and stupid failure to see

life values might have gone on indefinitely if the barn had not set the match to mother's resentment. She moves into the new barn!

One beginner in short story writing wrote a good tale about an old woman to whom a certain tree had become a symbol. When the tree was cut down by her callous daughter-in-law, grandma was so upset that she went to a "home" to live. A magazine carried a good story several years ago about a woman who refused to part with her bed which a daughter-in-law wanted to sell to an antique dealer. The bed had become a symbol of her past and she became a bedridden invalid rather than give it up. The power of the *visible catastrophe* generally lies in the fact that it becomes "an outward symbol of what has already taken place in the soul."

A Sociologist's Explanation

Regarding the very brief discussion of personality here presented, Walton S. Bittner, Associate Professor of Sociology in the Extension Division of Indiana University, makes the following comment:

Your psychology thesis is intriguing; it makes some very worthwhile suggestions. No writer can lose by making a study of human nature, whether or no he succeeds in disentangling the conflicting theories of psychology. But he should not be caught by only the new, and ignore the wealth of the old. There are fads in science as in art and everyday ruck of manners and morals. Light on human nature is to be found in the older psychologies and in the other social sciences as well. Sociology is rather *the* science of human nature, of interacting personalities in the social setting—humanity is nothing if not a group product, while psychology,

strictly speaking, deals with individual reactions. Unfortunately, too many writers fail to understand their own creations because they see them as unique creatures of a false or nonexistent inner compulsion; and the reader misses reality because it is obscured by the wrong emphasis. Perhaps only the novel can give us a true picture of life as it really is; but I believe any art form could be adapted to tell more than individual sin and sorrow, to give something of the wide sweep of social forces that set men and women dancing.

The older psychology of James, and the instinct system of McDougall may be dubious now; nevertheless they have valuable suggestions for the writer, even though he may be misled into thinking that mere biology and brute nature furnish the key to understanding of human conduct. A wide knowledge of all the brands of psychology and of anthropology and sociology as well is not without profit to the writer, as Dorsey has proved. His "Why We Behave Like Human Beings" might make a good short story of how physiology, the internal glandular secretions, and socially conditioned reflexes put the actor thru his paces.

You give considerable attention to conflict. Sociologists have long recognized the importance of struggle, clash, conflict and accommodation in the evolution of personality and the vagaries of group conduct. So, too, Behaviorism is a part of the trend away from biology toward an appreciation of the social setting in which we move and become men. Their conditioned stimulus and response theory is valid in so far as it is a recognition that the world about us and in us is the maker of people; for conditioning is not a mysterious inner process alone, if at all. It is but a convenient formula for the intricate interplay of other persons and objects pushing us story living people apart and about.

I think that without doubt the newer emphasis, the perception of the power of social environment—material and immaterial—as more important than the supposed internal drives of infantile fixation, sex and repression psychoses will

have an effect on fiction, as it already has to some extent in Hergesheimer, Poole, Ben Ames Williams. The writer should realize that many have been led astray by the stretching of psychoanalyst doctrines to do duty as explanation of normal humans, while those doctrines for the most part cover only a section of abnormal psychology. For a sounder literature than that of the Freudians, on obsession, repression, suggestion, unconscious motivation, one needs go to the French School and the many studies of social mind and crowd psychology.

Perhaps fiction need not explain causes of conduct, need not dig up the very roots of personality, but it should reveal a knowledge of the assumed causes, the supposed bases of conduct. The more widely those attempted explanations are extended the better; because variety and comprehensive penetration are the life of literature, the promise of the fresh and new. The more the writer is aware of the extent and intricacy of the play of causal sequences the better, because he can let the reader in for new insights, strange wonders and keen delight in the unforseen.

There ought to be inexhaustible sources of plot and character analysis in the newer social psychology—if a man is what he is not only because of hereditary structure, peculiar glandular balance, unique behavior patterns, conditioned reactions, habits, skills, aberrations and complexes; but also because of his social heritage of folkways and mores, his inheritance of traditions and beliefs, his membership in this culture circle and that, his isolation from or contact with the artifacts and culture traits of a hundred civilizations, and his exposure to machines and ideas as compelling as Jinns.

Professor Bittner's point is well taken: the student of personality should not permit himself to be led astray by any one theory or ism. There is no recipe for understanding character; there are only guideposts which help to show the way. Freud has had a tremendous

influence on modern thought and on present-day literature, but he offers only partial explanation of the emotional life and much of his theory is open to very serious objection. Watson's theory is now in the ascendency, but it, likewise, is too simple; it cannot explain some of the more baffling aspects of personality —aspects which have been the concern of the biologists and the "introspective" psychologists.

To Summarize: While the writer need not go deeply into a study of the conflicting theories of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and physiologists, about the reasons for human behavior, it is well to know something of the outstanding theories about the reasons "why we behave like human beings." Such a study helps particularly in an understanding of *motives* back of conduct. It greatly enlarges one's sympathy and increases his ability to analyze personality, and thus to give the reader new insight into the amazing intricacies of life.

CHAPTER XI

THE ANGLE OF NARRATION

"Never let the character who serves as a reflector record anything not naturally within his register," says Mrs. Wharton. "It should be the story teller's first care to choose this reflecting mind deliberately, as one would choose a building site, or decide upon the orientation of one's house, and when this is done, to live inside the mind chosen, trying to feel, see and react exactly as the latter would, no more, no less, and above all, no otherwise. Only thus can the writer avoid attributing incongruities of thought and metaphor to his chosen interpreter." [1] These are the requirements for "the ultimate effect of probability." That they are highly important goes without saying, yet a surprising number of beginners who feel sufficiently sure of their work to submit it to editors for sale are unaware even of the existence of an angle of narration!

Who Tells Your Story?

One of the technical problems that the story teller must solve is the selection of this angle. Who is to tell your story? Through whose eyes have the events been observed? What part, if any, does the narrator

[1] Quoted from *The Writing of Fiction,* by permission of the publishers, Chrales Scribner's Sons.

have in the tale? All these things you must know. And in making your decision you must take into consideration several matters, chief of which is probability.

Several angles are possible in any story: indeed, there are as many angles as there are characters, or possible witnesses, in addition to the angle of an objective all-seeing eye.

The Objective Angle

To take up the last-named first: the objective, or impersonal, angle is the one that simply records what happens much as a camera would record all objects within its range. There are two varieties of this angle, not always distinguished by technical writers. The story may be told simply as a record of action, without any insight into mental processes. This is the *"dramatic-objective"* angle. Bjornson used it in "The Father," which is a series of scenes, without any analysis of what goes on in a character's mind. Hemingway's "The Killers" is told in the same way, only the medium is almost entirely conversation. Daudet's poignant little story, "The Death of the Dauphin," is also told in this objective way. This angle is possible in a story involving essentially dramatic material or scenes. The events speak for themselves. The omniscient observer tells what happens as an onlooker at a play would tell about each scene. This angle is useful in gaining the effect of speed and dramatic power. The dramatic-objective method makes it impossible for the author to become sentimental, or to gush as he might do if he were employing a method less bald, or to pad the story.

Looking into the Mind

This method, however, is difficult to maintain. The most objective of writers find themselves slipping into the minds of their characters at times, in order to make actions clear. One of the commonest angles is that which starts out objectively and then at times seems to look into a character's mind. Even Maupassant, the most photographic of writers, deserts his objective angle over and over again, to tell us what his hero is thinking. It is true that he seems to tell it rather from the point of view of one still looking *in* at the mind, rather than that of the *mind itself*. This sort of looking in is not at all the same as the angle of the participant, though closely related to it. It might be called the *psychological-objective* angle.

"Moonlight," for instance, gives an objective effect and yet Maupassant gradually works around into the mind of the Abbe Marignan. "Why had God done this?" "Why this half veil over the world?" Maupassant here has taken the cover off the priest's mind, as it were, and reports what he sees there. The shift is subtle and difficult to distinguish and it causes the beginner a good deal of confusion. The important thing is to recognize, first of all, that the more consistent the angle, other things being equal, the better. Shifts in the angle may be desirable, but they should be made only after careful consideration. Maupassant deserted his usual objectivity in "Moonlight" because by doing so he could let us understand the priest's mental processes and his final conduct; and also because he depended upon the atmospheric, or emotional effect of the moonlight and this effect could best be portrayed

by looking into the priest's mind and watching that mind's reactions.

Angle of the Eye-Witness

Sometimes a story is told from the angle of a sort of eye-witness. The eye-witness takes no part in the story except that he sees things happening, acts as detective or reporter, or listens to a story that someone else tells him.

This is the angle used in a beautiful little story by James Hopper, "When It Happens." Here the "I" who narrates the story merely listens to Sam Nolan's confession at lunch. Sam talks about his operation and describes his feeling for his nurse. He imagines that "when real love happens" it happens that way, but his loyalty to his unsympathetic and dominating wife prevents any realization that love has "happened" to him. Why was the story not told entirely from Sam's angle? Probably because that would have afforded no opportunity for the sort of interpretative comment which gives real point to the story. Seeing Sam Nolan through the eyes of his friends at lunch, with what the friend contributes about the wife's strangling effect, and his comments upon Sam's looks and actions as Sam tells the story, greatly strengthens the emotional effect for the reader. It also clarifies the action itself.

The "I" who tells the story, "In the Pride of His Youth," enters in still less. In the first paragraph Kipling tells us that he is going to tell a story "with all the jest left out." Then in rather objective fashion, he gives the history of Dicky Hatt's life. At the end, he comments:

"The boy's mad!" said the Head.

I think he was right; but Dicky Hatt never reappeared to settle the question.

Balzac tells "La Grande Breteche" from the angle of a doctor who is staying near the old chateau. The doctor wanders in the deserted grounds and wonders about their history. Then the notary calls and tells him part of the story of the count and countess, but not the most thrilling part. Next the landlady enters and tells about the young Spaniard who owned the beautiful crucifix and later disappeared. Then the countess' former maid, Rosalie, enters and she tells about her master's unusually early return, one night, about his accusation of his wife, and about the walling up of the Spaniard. Thus the doctor, who is an entirely inactive person, pulls together the tales of three persons who have witnessed parts of the drama and passes on their stories to the reader. This method is wasteful in the extreme and it gives a disjointed effect that is a distinct handicap to an otherwise powerful story. Only a powerful story could stand it.

Angle of Subordinate Character

Between the angle of a person who serves simply as a witness or a reporter of things told by the real actors and the angle of a main participant, there are many gradations. For instance, in Kipling's "False Dawn" the story is told by "I" who enters in as a member of a picnic party on which Saumarez proposes to the wrong sister. As "I" goes after Edith Copleigh to bring her back to her lover he is a participant in the action, but he is entirely subordinate. The main

story centers about the triangle of the two sisters who wanted the same man and the man's proposal to the wrong woman.

The person who tells the story of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is also a subordinate character. He merely feels the atmosphere, watches what happens, tries to calm Roderick, and helps him entomb his sister. His rôle is atmospheric, rather than active. As the person who sees, hears, feels and is terrified by the insufferable gloom and impending disaster, he is important. But the whole story might have happened without him, for the only important actors are Roderick and his sister.

A still more active, yet subordinate rôle, is that occupied by the narrator in Algernon Blackwood's unforgettable mystery story, "The Pikestaff Case." This tale is told in the third person from the angle of a landlady who describes her mysterious roomer, and has forebodings about the mirror, and notes the roomer's conduct and disappearance.

An active rôle is that played by the narrator in Kipling's terrible story, "The Mark of the Beast." Here the man who tells the story has been one of the party who went with Fleete when he committed the sacrilege at the temple. This man later watches the transformation that comes over Fleete, who is the main actor, and finally helps to catch the avenging leper and by torturing him makes him loose the spell. For sheer terror, combined with supernatural mystery, this story is in a class by itself. Kipling used the one best angle in telling it—that of a man who would take part in all the action, naturally, as a companion of the possessed Fleete, and who would yet be impressed by

the horror of his transformation into a beast. Told objectively, on the other hand, this story would lose a good share of its terror, for an all-seeing eye could not be impressed as a person could be, and hence could not pass on the terror to the reader.

The Angle of the Leading Character

The angle of the leading character is an effective one, especially when the story depends much upon the portrayal of mental processes. One of the most perfect and best-known examples of the use of this angle is Stevenson's "Markheim," which tells in the *third person* but from the angle of the leading character, how a man commits murder and all the things that go through his mind immediately afterward, until he becomes so wrought up over his sin that he confesses.

The main character tells the story in the *first person* in Sherwood Anderson's "I'm a Fool." A young greenhorn, used to taking care of horses, having achieved the sum of forty dollars, goes to the races in style as a spectator. The story is interesting because it shows what goes on in the mind of a character of that sort, shows his reaction to a temporary rise in worldly position, and his final recognition of the fact that he has been a fool. Only the psychological or introspective method could do justice to the rapidly changing emotions of the green, bragging, romantic country boy who repented his lies when he fell in love with a girl of another social class. And no one but that boy himself could tell it in such absolutely characteristic language. Half the reality in the story lies in his fervid comments, his "Gee whiz, craps amighty," and his

"Gosh darn his eyes. He's a big fool—that's what he is." Here is an eternally boyish transfer of rage at himself to the fellow with the Windsor tie that carried a cane. Here is the perfect angle for the subject-matter. Told objectively the story would be quite ineffective.

More Than One Angle Possible

Sometimes a story may be told equally well from more than one angle. The story of Dicky Hatt, instead of being narrated by an inactive witness, might have been told entirely objectively by an omniscient, impersonal observer; or it might, perhaps, have been better told by Dicky himself. If it had been told by Dicky, the leading character, in the first person, it would have read as follows:

> I, Dicky Hatt, was kidnapped early in my youth, neither by landlady's daughter, housemaid, barmaid, or cook but by a girl so nearly my own caste that only a woman could have said she was below it.

Dicky could have gone on and told about his love affair, his marriage, his appointment to India, his concealment of his marriage, his wife's letter for money, and finally the letter telling of her faithlessness, just before word comes of his promotion. Told in this way the story would have had a much less objective effect and would have given us much more of Dicky's mental processes and his despair.

"False Dawn," on the other hand, could hardly have been told by one of the sisters, because each sister was victim of a misunderstanding and the story is effective

because only the subordinate actor sees all that is happening.

The writer must always remember, of course, that when he selects the angle of a given character he can record only what that character would know. Poe could not have told "The Fall of the House of Usher" from the standpoint of Roderick because Roderick died at the end. But he had to tell "The Pit and the Pendulum" from the angle of the person who experienced it; no one else could do justice to the terrors portrayed. An all-seeing eye might have witnessed it but the objective method does not permit of the conveyance of much feeling and most of the effect of terror would have been lost. Hence Poe's angle was exactly right.

Shifting the Angle

Sometimes it is best to shift the angle from character to character. Steele did this in "Six Dollars." The story is a beautiful illustration of the way in which an angle can be shifted unobtrusively. The reader is never conscious of any bump, or break in the narrative. Most of the story is told in the third person from Snow's angle; but at times the reader needs to know what his wife is thinking. Then we find ourselves seeing things as Elsie does. For instance, when Snow has fled from the politicians into the night. Elsie has gone to look for him in his room.

> She shut her eyes and opened them again.
>
> "Fog," she said to herself.
>
> She turned around. What was the matter with this room tonight? Why was everything so-so-so wrong—so lost—so funny?

Unmistakably, this is Elsie's angle. Later, just at the end, the story is told objectively, with the scene in the Stone Fold photographed as seen by an all-seeing eye. For the beginner this shifting about would be dangerous business, for it involves perfect command of the technique of writing. But in the hands of an artist it has been remarkably well done.

Angle Not a Matter of Pronoun

The reader has probably noted that the angle of narration is not necessarily a matter of the use of a pronoun. Telling a story through the use of a first person, "I," does not mean that the angle is set by the "I." "I" may be an inactive witness, as Kipling often is, or he may be a subordinate participant, or he may be the main character. The angle may be the same, whether a story is told in the first person or in the third. For instance, "Six Dollars" might have been told not only *from* Snow's angle but *by* Snow himself. In that case the beginning might have read as follows:

When I was a young man of eighteen, I went one night to the Stone Fold to meet Donna Salisbury. Donna wasn't pretty. But she was strong and if her face had a dull look, there was something behind the dullness that would make a fellow stop and look again. I couldn't understand why I wanted to have anything to do with her. I'd been to the Academy and now I had a position in the new bank. I had to be decent, etc.

The reader will see that thus far the effect is the same as it is when Steele tells the story from Snow's angle, in the *third* person. The use of "I" has not changed it at all. But if Steele had gone on using the

"I" he would not have been able to tell what was going on in Elsie's mind without abandoning his "I" for her angle, and abandoning the "I" would have been difficult and awkward. Shifts are easier with the third person pronoun.

As an exercise try telling a story from several different angles. You will gain in technical power.

To Summarize: The angle of narration is an important technical element because it involves the effect of probability. While nearly any story can be told from several different angles, the subject-matter usually determines the best one. The objective or impersonal angle has speed and dramatic power, but is lacking in adaptability for the portrayal of mental processes and is, therefore, difficult to maintain. The angle of some character in a story is generally better because it gives the author an opportunity to show mental processes. It also supplies a reflector for atmospheric or emotional effects. The angle from which a story is told must not be confused with the personal pronoun used. So far as possible it is best to stick to one angle, but occasionally there may be gain in shifting. When shifts are made, the writer should be careful to keep the illusion of reality.

CHAPTER XII

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE

The association of material objects with ideas and emotions is important. Some places have atmosphere in themselves; some lanes demand lovers, some alleys threaten crime, some old houses cry out for ghosts. Do you not know such places? Use them in your stories. This association of material objects with ideas and emotions is a phenomenon which is important because setting and atmosphere are intensifiers of character and action; when they are properly used they add greatly to the dramatic thrill. Unless definitely and unmistakably connected, however, with the other elements, they should be left out. The stock setting, like a photographer's painted background, is an artistic atrocity. The casual reader skips it because he feels its irrelevance; the critical one deeply resents it.

What Setting Is

Setting is the time and the place of the story. It is physical surroundings plus the home and social environment; it is such objects as furniture, grounds, village or city. Moreover, if I come from a certain social group in a given community, I appear to the world in the frame set by my environment: my clothes, my dress, and indeed, my speech, "manners," and my ideas—all of them things which seem to belong to character—are really a part of my setting. Kipling's Eng-

lishmen in the Indian army are *framed* in their social environment, just as Bret Harte's mining camp characters are framed in *their* social environment.

What Atmosphere Is

Atmosphere, on the other hand, is more than setting. It is setting *plus emotional effect.* It is the mood, the spirit of the place, the pervading impression. We go to the theatre. The stage is set with trees, grass, a dark wood house in the distance, and constitutes an outdoor scene without any particular emotional effect as seen in the broad glare of ordinary electric lights. But turn the bright lights off and throw exactly the right combination of green and blue lights over the stage and see what happens. It has become mysterious, and perhaps, frightening; especially if the whole thing is veiled in a thin mist, with the moonlight filtering dimly through the trees. The scene has taken on atmosphere. The atmosphere is still more impressive when characters enter, moving about in the half-light and whispering or talking in low, frightened voices.

The importance of atmosphere is at once clear when one considers the nature of the short story and its purpose—the creation of a dramatic single effect. Character and action are the bare essentials and they may turn the trick in themselves; but the introduction of atmosphere greatly increases the intensity of the effect they make.

As Used in the Stories Here Reprinted

Setting is minimized in the stories "The Father," "The Adoption," and "The Killers." These stories

are universal for the most part and might happen anywhere. The setting of "The Father" is, judging from the names, a small Norwegian village, but the element of atmosphere is negligible. The setting of "The Adoption" is one of poverty, but the story would fit any place or time; the atmosphere is almost nil. These stories, like "The Necklace" and "The Piece of String," are sufficiently strong in dramatic action to get along without atmosphere. The events are the thing. The objectivity of the telling would hardly permit of the introduction of atmosphere. Setting is likewise minimized in "The Killers." There seems to be a small-town restaurant. We associate it with the Southwest, perhaps New Mexico. Yet the action, in this case also, might have happened anywhere. The little atmosphere that one feels is entirely the result of the suspense engendered by the conversation and action. Speaking in terms of definition (atmosphere is time and place, or setting, plus emotional effect), there is no atmosphere. Setting is also minimized in "The Doll's House" in which the chief feature is the picture of narrow class distinctions in an English village. The dress and manner of the children are of particular importance and the atmosphere is one of child life. What there is of setting and atmosphere enhances the story. But the action might have happened in any country having class distinctions—and what country does not?

On the other hand in "The Birthmark" the setting is highly important. The scene lies in a chemical laboratory of the eighteenth century, a century in which the "secret discovery of electricity seemed to open the paths into the region of the miracle." There are stage

properties of furnace smoke and acid stains and an assistant of bulky frame with shaggy hair hanging about his visage "grimed with the vapors of the furnace," and *named Aminadab!* All this is supplemented by an apartment in which the curtains are so arranged as to shut in the scene "from infinite space." Thus, though he uses few setting details, Hawthorne secures, *by virtue of their selection* and *arrangement as combined with theme, character, and events,* a very definite atmospheric effect. We get the sense of danger, combined with fear of the fanatical devotion to mysterious alchemy. A modern laboratory, chemical, bacteriological, or physical, would be an excellent scene for an up-to-date story dealing with a similar idea. Try it and see: try putting a hero who deals with germs in a situation where he tries an experiment on the woman he loves; or try having him work on her with chemicals; or with an electric current or an X-ray!

"The Cask of Amontillado" makes good use of setting. In this story the damp catacombs and winding wine cellars are integrated with the story of Italian revenge, and by way of contrast as well as plot development, with a fête and motley dress. The atmosphere that results from this particular combination of material objects and circumstances is one of horror and subterranean clamminess.

"Moonlight" is largely atmosphere. The moon so plays upon the priest's heart that it becomes a *character in the story.* The moonlight is not only the cause of the priest's inner struggle, but it is his antagonist. He wrestles with it and finally succumbs to its sensuous power.

Atmosphere Is Subjective

Atmosphere is emotional effect aroused in someone; therefore it is subjective. It is interesting to note that Maupassant, who is nearly always highly objective in his attitude, becomes subjective in "Moonlight." He seldom makes much use of atmosphere. It may be that his material is determined by his objectivity, or vice versa. At any rate, his impersonal and objective method of narration was incompatible with such a story as "Moonlight" and he departed from his usual technique in telling the story.

Poe's material is exactly the opposite. It is, in itself, highly atmospheric. He deals with the bizarre, the fantastic and unreal, the mysterious and awful. He must use atmosphere. And his most strongly atmospheric stories are invariably told from the angle of a participant—"The Fall of the House of Usher," for instance, or "A Descent into the Maelstrom," "The Black Cat," "Berenice," or "Ligeia." Poe could not possibly have got his intense emotional effects if he had tried to use an objective angle. Try writing a Poe story without using atmosphere and see what difficulties you encounter! Then try a Poe imitation with atmosphere and see how easy it is to get a vivid effect.

Setting and Characterization

Setting is often important to the understanding of character. Its effect on the determination of character traits cannot be denied however the degree of its influence may be debated. According to the "behaviorists," it is, in so far as it *sets experience* the dominant factor in personality. Man is the product of his experience;

his experience is the sum total of the things that have happened to him, the *stimuli* which he has received. If I live in Bog Hollow my experiences are those of Bog Hollow; I am stimulated by the grunt of the pigs, the smoke of the factories, and roar of the trains, and the pangs of hunger. Perhaps I turn out a thief. If I live on a country estate of great beauty, I am stimulated by the beauty of woods and fields, the odor of flowers, and the thousand and one accompaniments of highly cultured life. Perhaps I turn out an author or a painter. The same environments may produce opposite effects, you will say at once, believing in heredity; and I will agree with you for I also believe in heredity. But we can both agree that the environment as a general rule has a great deal to do with the formation of character. At any rate, it often seems to explain character, especially when we think of it in terms of home, father and mother, school, playmates, and work.

The extent to which setting and atmosphere influence development is, of course, a matter chiefly for conjecture. The social workers and psychiatrists believe that the influence is highly important and they base their conclusions on a great mass of data. Their investigations deal chiefly, however, with home and school factors. So far as this writer knows, it does not deal much, if at all, with the influence of scenery on character. What does the sea do to the man who lives on the coast? What do the mountains do to the sheepherder who lives on their slopes? What does the prairie do to the woman who lives in its monotony? The sociologists have speculated a good deal upon the effect of natural phenomena upon belief—the relation of sun, moon, wind, rain, lightning, drought to reli-

gious custom and to folk-lore. They have tried to relate climatic conditions to the development of racial qualities. But they have not done as much psychologically with this material as they might have done. Perhaps the writers of our time are pointing the way.

Only Universal Characters Can Stand Alone

The student who sets for himself the task of picking out characters that are independent of their times and places—characters that can stand alone, without background—will be surprised to note that there are not as many as he would think. They are more often found in foreign than in American literature. We have not yet struck the universal note. Maupassant's Madame Loisel is such a character and so is the Father in Bjornson's tale. These people are more puppets of fate than they are vivid personalities. On the other hand, Tchekhov's famous character, Olenka in "The Darling," while she is a distinct individual, is universal, the ultimate feminine type that lives for love and completely sinks its individuality in that of the beloved. She belongs to all countries and all time.

Local Color Has Made Reputations

Many famous authors have used setting to such an extent that they are thought of as "local color" artists. While Kipling tells a rattling good tale any time, he is, after all, primarily a local color man. So was Bret Harte. Both men were made famous by their use of setting. Other writers definitely associated with setting are: Maurice Hewlett and James Branch Cabell, with medieval romance; Arnold Bennett, with

the smoke and commonplaceness of The Five Towns; Thomas Hardy, with the brooding power of Egdon Heath.

More and more our American fiction is dwelling on the relationship between character and environment. More and more our writers are producing stories of "typically American" communities. Ellen Glasgow's "Barren Ground," for instance, has as its theme the close relationship between a piece of land and the woman who lives on it: the ground is almost personified, so strong is its influence. Martha Ostenso's "Wild Geese" integrates setting and atmosphere with characters which are the product of the severe North Dakota struggle with prairie and cold and heat. Hamlin Garland's characters belong in the same setting. Sherwood Anderson writes of characters produced by middle western small-town environment, characters with the reek of the stable, and the grime of the newspaper office. Booth Tarkington writes of middle class boys growing up in prosperous middle western city environments. Mary E. Wilkins and New England are inseparable. We associate O. Henry with the bright lights of New York of yesterday; and Carl Van Vechten with those of today. Broadly speaking, the people who move through the stories of all these writers are products of their surroundings, are definitely integrated with their surroundings.

To Summarize: Setting is the time and place of the story. Atmosphere is setting plus emotional effect and it serves to increase the intensity. Setting is often important as an explanation of character development; atmosphere as an intensifier of mood.

CHAPTER XIII

SETTING DOMINATING CHARACTER

We have noted that setting and character are closely related. Setting may actually dominate characters. Then we call the result an "atmosphere story." Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" is one of the most famous examples of this domination. The narrator reflects, in the beginning, upon the power of natural objects to affect their beholders. He believes that all vegetable things have a sentience or consciousness, and that this sentience is fulfilled in the arrangement even of the gray stones of the house, as well as in the fungi which overspread them and the decayed trees that stand around. The character of Usher was, like the environment, in process of dissolution. And Poe integrated setting and action still further when, in his terrific dénouement, he made the disintegration of both Usher and his sister practically coincident with the fall of the house.

Conrad and Atmosphere

In thinking of dominant setting, one thinks first of Joseph Conrad. He is preeminently the writer of setting and atmosphere. He sees men in a terrific struggle against a universe that is ironic and cruel, an overwhelming universe composed of the deafening wind and the blazing sun. His years upon the seas engraved upon his sensitive mind the realization of

the domination of nature over insignificant man. And thus we find him writing of a mighty jungle river that, first seen on a map, lures the hero to its mysterious banks. It and the wilderness surrounding it become a force "great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion."

The narrator, Captain Marlow, has been sitting on the river bank:

> The smell of mud, or primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver—over the rank grease, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a somber gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself. I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us?
>
> . . . . .
>
> Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of the sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. . . . And this stillness of life did not in the least re-

semble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention.[1]

An "implacable force"—thus the tropical setting takes on personality—broods over the beholder until it becomes an antagonist. "Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us?"

Conrad is preeminently the master of the atmosphere story. He imparts to places and scenes something vital that gives them spirit and meaning. He is bold and daring; he is not afraid to use strong pigment, to let his imagination run riot in the contemplation of nature. Try to describe a setting which you know, as Conrad might describe it.

Thomas Hardy is also a master of atmosphere. Egdon Heath plays an almost human rôle in the absorbing drama that takes place in "The Return of the Native." Its somber wildness is always there, brooding over the lives of men and women.

By its mere complexion it added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread.

. . . . .

When other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something but it had waited thus, unmoved during so many centuries, through the crises of so

[1] Quoted from "Heart of Darkness," in the collection *Youth*, with the permission of the publishers, Doubleday, Doran and Company, and of the Trustees of the Estate of Joseph Conrad.

many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis—the final overthrow. Civilization was its enemy.[2]

Not "Why," But "How"

The reader who observes closely will note that the best examples of atmospheric writing pay no attention to causes. Causes are scientific and are perceived through the intelligence. Effects are emotional and are felt by the senses. Conrad, for instance, does not tell you *why* the jungle river was thick and sluggish or why it was still—those facts belong in the realm of science and are irrelevant so far as emotional effect is concerned. The important thing is to know *how* the river affected the beholder, *not why*. Neither does Hardy tell you why Egdon Heath impressed one as it did; he simply tells what the impression is.

The writer selects some one mood or feeling that he wants to give the reader. He then uses only those details which go to enhance that mood. He must know exactly what it is—he should be able to name it (to himself, of course): "This is the story of a man who was overcome by the mysterious terror of a house." "This is the story of the silence of the night, 'the chill of a large, white moon' and what it did to two men and a woman." Then, having determined upon the impression that he wishes to make, the writer selects each detail with the one prevailing note in view. Much must be discarded; the full reality of nature may be too chaotic, may add elements that would detract from the delicate impression to be conveyed. This business of

[2] Quoted from *The Return of the Native*, by Thomas Hardy, by permission of the publishers, Harper and Brothers.

atmosphere is fundamentally a matter for the artist: it requires the temperament to see and feel delicate shades and moods, and it further requires the ability to make others feel them—which is a matter of artistic technique.

Implies a Beholder

Atmosphere consists of a mood or an impression. Hence, it implies a beholder, *someone to be impressed,* someone to experience the mood. Without going into a discussion of the philosophy of beauty, one can say that a Grand Canyon is awe-inspiring only in so far as someone can see and feel it. Atmosphere, then, nearly always has something to do with the mood of a character in the story. It is for this reason, as we have pointed out in the discussion of the angle of narration, that the objective angle fails to produce atmosphere. Let him who doubts this statement consider "Moonlight." As we have said, Maupassant starts to tell the story objectively—he tells *about* the priest, describes him as if looking at him from above. But when the priest goes out into the moonlight, the angle immediately becomes less objective, more subjective, and we are finally in the priest's mind, *feeling* the moonlight with him. As atmosphere is introduced, the angle becomes subjective.

Atmosphere is, in its most effective forms, bound up with the very nature of the characters that experience it. It reaches its greatest power when it is tied up with their moods and reinforces their moods. Hence, the sort of person who feels it must be the sort of person who *could* feel it. Conrad's Marlow, who tells

the story in both "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness," was the sort of boy who had imagination enough to feel the lure of the sea and the jungle; Poe's Usher was a character of exaggerated sensibilities, suffering from a morbid acuteness of the senses—a victim to a "host of unnatural sensations." He was the sort of person who could imagine the sentience of a house. The narrator of this story was also a sensitive personality.

This is important, for the degree of the impression made depends upon the nervous make-up of the beholder. The phlegmatic, overfed rich woman goes to the country in her automobile on a spring afternoon and gets a general feeling of brightness and well-being. She likes the country in the sunshine and she may notice the blossoming fruit trees. The young poet goes to the same country and actually suffers from the beauty of it. He is acutely conscious of each exquisite bird note, each golden daffodil—of the very feeling of the air and sky. And he writes a lyric poem. He has felt intensely and he is able to convey that feeling to others.

Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss" has a heroine who is sensitive enough to feel deeply the beauty of a blossoming pear tree and imaginative enough to identify herself with the tree. James Stephens' hero in "Etched in Moonlight" is the sort of person so acutely sensitive, so imaginative that he can feel atmosphere as an important element in a situation that drives him insane.

Integrating Atmosphere and Character

Character can often be unified with atmosphere. Sometimes the unification consists of a *general similar-*

ity of *mental traits* with setting: gloomy man with dark woods; dancing girl with life and energy with dancing waves in the sunlight; the disintegrating personality of Usher, with the decaying house. At other times the forces of nature or environment serve to modify the character. That is what happens in "Moonlight"; they contribute to the change of character in Somerset Maughan's play "Rain"; they produce the final catastrophe in O'Neill's "Emperor Jones."

Atmosphere directly brings about action in James Stephens' marvelous story "Etched in Moonlight." A man madly (the word is used advisedly) in love is forced to take a walk with his lady and the man she has just promised to marry.

The day was finished and all that remembered the sun had gone. The wind which had stirred faintly in tall branches had lapsed to rest. No breath moved in the world, and the clouds that had hurried before were quiet now, or were journeying in other regions of the air. Clouds there were in plenty; huge, pilings of lights and shade; for a great moon, burnished and thin, and so translucent that a narrowing of the eyes might almost let one peer through it, was standing far to the left; and in the spaces between the clouds there was a sharp scarce glitter of stars.

There was more than light enough to walk by; for that great disk of the heavens poured a radiance about us that was almost as bright as day.

. . . . .

We walked on heedless of time; and heedless of all but those voices that came to me with an unending, unheard, explanation: the voices of those who cared naught for me; who cared only that I was there, an edge to their voluptuousness.

. . . . .

But when one walks one arrives somewhere. If the environment had not changed we might have gone on forever. This walk and talk had grown unto us like a monstrous habit from which we could not break away; and until a change came to the eye our minds could not swerve from the world they were building nor our feet from the grasses we walked on.

The change did occur, mercifully; the little variety which might deturn that level of moonbred, lovesick continuity or inertia; for we think largely through the eyes, or our thoughts flow easily to the direction in which our gaze is set.

The great park, waving with separated trees, came abruptly to an end.

At this step it was yet sward. But ten paces beyond it was a rubble of bush and rock, unkempt as a beggarman's beard. Everywhere there were bits of walls with crumbling ledges up which the earth was gradually mounting and which the grass had already conquered.

Under the beam of that great flat moon the place seemed wildly beautiful; with every mound a glory of silver and peace, and every hollow a pit of blackness and mystery. A little beyond, perfect, although in the hub and center of the ruin, a vast edifice reared against the sky, and it shone white as snow in the moonlight except where a projecting battlement threw an ebon shade.

The lovers slip in through a massive door, "a dense black slit in the moonlight."

There was silence without and within, but I found that my eyes were fixed on that silence within; and from it, as I expected, almost as I willed, there came, as though bred from the silence, a sound. It was ten times more discreet than a whisper, and was to be heard only by an ear that knew it would come. . . . My hands went out without any

direction from me; they gripped on the door; and, with the strength of ten men, I pulled on it.[3]

It closed with only a "fraction of sound" but a sound which "continued and completed itself, as a scream which I should never cease to hear; while still with hanging jaw and fixed eyes I stared at the closed door."

Stephens has integrated action and atmosphere in this story. "If the environment had not changed, we might have gone on forever." But it did change and then the hands went out and shut the door. Love madness, hypnotism of sex attraction, hypnotism of moon, and a vast edifice "etched in moonlight," except for an occasional "ebon shadow"—what a perfect selection of material! It is so overwhelming as Stephens tells it that one readily believes that the frightful dream is a reality rather than a dream—which, perhaps, is just what he wanted us to believe.

To Gain Intensity

The place had emotional quality. Its fifteen-foot masonry demanded incarceration of lovers and that is exactly what James Stephens gave it. Moreover, he piled his effect up repeatedly; he even repeated the main part of the approach and entrance a second time. *Repetition,* of course, is one of the best ways of *intensifying emotional effect.*

What do we mean by the word "intensify"? *Intensity is the amount of quality experienced.* It is the ultimate criterion of the success of one's method of

[3] James Stephens, *Etched in Moonlight,* Copyright, 1928, by The Macmillan Company. Reprinted by permission.

creating a given effect. When we say that a story has "intensity," we mean that the author has achieved the full emotional effect—that he has made the most of his materials. Intensity is achieved, in many instances, through the repetition of atmospheric details and effects at intervals, each repetition strengthening the final impression. It is a psychological law that repetition heightens effect. The first mention of a sensory impression (sound, taste, smell, touch, sight) may make little or no impression; but constant repetition will produce definite and even violent reactions. One bead of water dripping from a faucet passes entirely unnoticed; but a continual drip, drip, will drive almost anyone to profanity; it will drive the highly sensitive to madness. Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" depended upon the piling up and repetition of effects. Maupassant's "Moonlight" built up a series of impressions until the final climax came in which the lovers embraced and "seemed like one being, the being for whom was destined this calm and silent night." The lovers and the landscape were integrated; they were a part of one effect.

Appeal to the Senses Definitely

The sensory images required for the production of emotional effect are produced by *definite objects.* Any emotional situation involves a complex group of stimuli: sound, sight, taste, smell, touch—as well as the mental factors such as memory, idea, and symbol. Emotional reaction is made up of some or all of these different elements and is, therefore, in literature highly dependent upon their concrete portrayal. The writer

must deal with words, rather than the objects themselves. The painter conveys his meaning directly by showing the house or what-not; the writer must get the *word* that will, by means of associative processes, call up definite images in the reader's mind. Abstractions are no good whatever. They are valueless, and worse than valueless; they clutter up, confuse, and produce irritation. Words should call up concrete images; "vacant eye-like windows" is better than "a lonely house." "Every hollow a pit of blackness and mystery" is better than "a moonlight night with shadows."

The appeal to a number of senses at the same time is, moreover, better than a more limited appeal. "Etched in Moonlight" is full of reference to the *lack* of sound, the silence, as well as reference to the looks of objects in the moonlight, and in the darkness. "There was silence except for the innumerable rustlings bred of grass and quiet trees and a wind too delicate to be heard and scarcely to be felt; for, though the skies were brisk, there was but little ground wind."

Variety of Sensory Appeal Important

Conrad's "Youth" contains a passage of great beauty and power: the scene at the docks when Marlow opens his eyes in the morning. The passage contains color, movement, quality (heavy metal).

And then I saw the men of the East—they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the color of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sign, without a movement. They stared down at the boats, at the sleeping men who at night had come upon them from the sea. Nothing moved. The

fronds of palms stood still against the sky. Not a branch stirred along the shore, and the brown roofs of hidden houses peeped through the green foliage, through the big leaves that hung shining and still like leaves forged of heavy metal. This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, full of danger and promise. And these were the men. I sat up suddenly. A wave of movement passed through the crowd from end to end, passed along the heads, swayed the bodies, ran along the jetty like a ripple of water, like a breath of wind on a field—and all was still again.[4]

Sherwood Anderson's "I Want to Know Why" contains the vivid description of a young boy's lyrical response to details that most people would regard as sordid; details of odor and of sound, and sensation.

At the tracks you sit on the fence with men, whites and niggers, and they chew tobacco and talk, and then the colts are brought out. It's early and the grass is covered with shiny dew and in another field a man is plowing and they are frying things in a shed where the track niggers sleep, and you know how a nigger can giggle and laugh and say things that make you laugh. A white man can't do it and some niggers can't but a track nigger can every time.

. . . . .

Well, out of the stables they come and the boys are on their backs and its lovely to be there. You hunch down on top of the fence and itch inside you. Over in the sheds the niggers giggle and sing. Bacon is being fried and coffee made. Everything smells lovely. Nothing smells better than coffee and manure and horses and niggers and bacon

[4] Quoted from *Youth,* with the permission of Doubleday, Doran and Company, publishers, and of the Trustees of the Estate of Joseph Conrad.

frying and pipes being smoked out of doors on a morning like that. It just gets you, that's what it does.[5]

Hardy, the master of realism, gives us a variety of sensory impression in "The Son's Veto":

Taking no exercise, she often could not sleep, and would rise in the night or early morning and look out upon the then vacant thoroughfare, where the lamps stood like sentinels waiting for some procession to go by. An approximation of such a procession was indeed made every morning about one o'clock, when the country vehicles passed up with loads of vegetables for Covent Garden market. She often saw them creeping along at this silent and dusky hour—wagon after wagon, bearing green bastions of cabbages nodding to their fall, yet never falling; walls of baskets enclosing masses of beans and pease; pyramids of snow-white turnips; swaying howdahs of mixed produce—creeping along behind aged night-horses, who seemed ever patiently wondering between their hollow coughs why they had always to work at that still hour when all other sentient creatures were privileged to rest. Wrapped in a cloak, it was soothing to watch and sympathize with them when depression and nervousness hindered sleep, and to see how the fresh green-stuff brightened to life as it came opposite the lamp and how the sweating animals steamed and shone with their miles of travel.[6]

Details Must Be Concrete

These details are rich in imagery—"lamps like sentinels," "pyramids of turnips," "swaying howdahs." Hardy might have written in generalizations about an early morning scene with infinite loss of effect; he

[5] From *The Triumph of the Egg,* published by B. W. Huebsch, Inc., The Viking Press. Quoted by permission.

[6] Quoted from collection, *Life's Little Ironies,* by Thomas Hardy, with the permission of the publishers, Harper and Brothers.

chose instead the concrete and the perfect words. The writer must avoid the use of generalized statements about "beautiful days," "dark nights," "stormy seas." Days are beautiful in many different ways to different people. The author's problem is that of conveying the special and the specific impression of a given day upon a given person. He can do it only through the selection of the exact word and phrase, and the careful avoidance of the trite and hackneyed.

Generalized and hackneyed writing is weak and ineffective; it bores the reader and betrays the laziness of the writer. Such expressions as "the briny deep," "a soft white mantle of snow," "a lake like a mirror," "the bounding billow," "the festive board," and countless others listed among the "don'ts" in our rhetorics, are weak because they have been so overworked as to have lost effectiveness. They are the mark of the amateur.

The writer must always reckon with the fact that literary usage and custom has its influence upon the connotation of words and phrases. Overuse ultimately robs the best phrase of its power to produce an image.

Certain Moods Associated with Natural Phenomena

The converse is also true: literary custom has brought about an association of moods and emotional effect with natural phenomena. Rain normally goes with gloom and depression in literature; but rain pattering on a cottage roof serves to emphasize the cheeriness of one's comfort and shelter, especially if there is a grate fire crackling on the hearth. Sunlight traditionally becomes "a mockery" to those in trouble. The

buffeting winds are overwhelming to the lonely and exhausted traveler, but they are inspiration and challenge to the spirit that is elated. One associates with certain moods certain natural phenomena which have become symbolic. An analysis of the psychological and sociological processes by which this comes about is not within the range of this book. The roots go far back into the realm of primitive folk-lore and religion. They have been partially investigated by various archeologists, sociologists, and ethnologists. The causes are not necessarily important to the story writer. The thing for him is recognition that these relationships and effects exist and vitally influence human life.

To Summarize: Setting dominates character in the so-called "atmosphere story." The atmosphere story is not concerned with causes—which are scientific, but with effects—which are emotional. It must be felt by someone and usually implies a beholder in the story, someone who is impressed. The greatest emotional effect and intensity are gained through the integration of atmosphere and character and through the use of definite appeals to the senses. Details should, therefore, be concrete. Tradition has associated certain moods with certain natural phenomena and further intensity can be gained through the use of such associations or symbols.

CHAPTER XIV

BEGINNING YOUR STORY

From the practical standpoint, the beginning is the most important part of the story. It is the author's means of getting an audience, first, with the editor who determines its fate so far as publication is concerned, and second, with the reading public. No matter how gripping the plot or how interesting the characterization, a weak beginning is likely to kill the story. The competition of magazines and writers in the field of fiction is so intense, there are so many appeals to readers, that the story that promises to be dull has no chance.

Beware the "Introduction"

Beginning with commonplace description, with a long explanation, a long thought-monologue on the part of the heroine, or dwelling on past events told with a liberal use of "hads"—all these practices doom the story to failure from the start. The young author usually writes several pages of what he calls introduction. He overlooks the fact that the reader is interested in the hero's *present.* The effect of presentness and of impending crisis is, as we have noted, the thing that counts. Practically every writer has to learn to discard his beginnings. These beginnings are merely preliminary "heats," to borrow a race-track expression. They are essentially experimental and constitute a sort

of warming-up process. The real beginning usually comes farther along and involves the omission of several paragraphs, or even pages. One should realize this universal tendency toward the use of weak introductory material and be on his guard against it.

"Where Does My Story Get Exciting"

An easy way to avoid the "introduction" is to read your story to someone or two people, or even a larger group, and then ask, "When did you really begin to be interested?" About nine times out of ten the reply will indicate that the first hint of suspense, and hence the real beginning, comes quite a way along. The first paragraphs have been deadwood. The story gets interesting when the reader realizes that something is *going to happen.* You can train yourself to view your manuscript critically and to find this point by putting it away and letting it "soak," as one prominent author calls it, for several days or even weeks. One always profits by a critical reading of his manuscript after a lapse of time during which the mind has been refreshed by diversion to other subjects. The process of writing, moreover, the rise of interest and inspiration, in itself inhibits the critical faculty during the creative time. There must be a cycle of creation, criticism, and alteration. You simply cannot judge your work as competently during the creative period as during the period when you return to it critically.

Using Description

The necessity for getting quickly into action complicates the use of description. The writer is con-

fronted by two horns of a dilemma. He must use enough description to place his characters in their setting and to prepare the way for what is to come; if he fails to do so the story will not be clear and the actors will not be real; the reader wants to visualize them at once against their background. But most readers are easily bored by description. The author has to strike a happy medium, using only as much description as seems necessary, only such details as are effective and striking. Descriptive details slow down action and action is an important element at the start. On the other hand, it is fatal to distract the reader's attention by the use of long descriptive passages at critical and exciting moments. So far as continuity of action is concerned, description comes best at the beginning before the action is really under way.

Massing Details

As a general rule, it is safe to mass description at the *introduction* of the *main element* of *interest.* Character details come best when we first meet the character; setting details when we first come upon the scene; situation details upon the first mention of the situation. There is generally some one dominating element, trait, or complication in every effective story; keeping his single effect always in mind, the trained writer masses his details upon the introduction of that element.

In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe masses his description at the opening, where he dwells upon the effect of the place. His story is primarily about a house; what more natural than to begin with the house and the outstanding things about it? Mary E. Wilkins'

"New England Nun" is a story about a woman who was dominated by her love of the trivialities of her daily life and house; what more natural than that she should begin her story with a description of her, her home, and her daily routine in it? Maupassant's "Moonlight" is about a priest who must reason out his emotions and sensual experiences; it begins with describing the man and his mental processes. "The Necklace" is about a woman who pays a high price for a bit of vanity; the story begins with a minute description of the heroine's vanity and desire for admiration and luxury. Steele's "Six Dollars" is based on a conflict of desires; it begins with that conflict.

The simplest and most logical way to tell a story based on some one outstanding factor, such as a character trait, an atmospheric effect, a bit of setting, or a dramatic situation—is by beginning with that factor.

When You Must Refer to the Past

Above all, beware the past. One of the most fatal types of beginning is that giving a long description of things that are over with. The reader wants the present and if it is necessary for him to know the past in order to understand the present, by all means let him have it only *incidentally*. I have, let us say, a story about a woman who has a "complex" against marriage. The complex was caused by certain events of her childhood. Do I begin with her childhood? Not by any means, in a short story. In a novel I might do so; but in the short story I begin with her present situation and then I go back and tell whatever events of the past are necessary to make us understand her present. From

that I go on to the main action of the story. While the chronological order is a logical one that has been thoroughly—all too thoroughly—drilled into most of us, it is not by any means the dramatic one. It is to be viewed with a good deal of suspicion in the short story.

Telling the Reader What to Look For

When one's plot is weak and the characterization is not sufficiently distinctive to compensate, a story may be greatly improved by the introduction of an opening which states the theme or philosophical idea. Kipling uses this device repeatedly. It is, as we have pointed out (page 98), the counterpart of the interpretative comment at the end; only instead of telling the reader how to interpret what has happened, it tells him *what to look for*. Thus it prepares him for the story, which is to be proof of a theory about life. He expects to find the proof and looks for proof rather than story. O. Henry and Kipling furnish many examples of the use of this device for strengthening a story. Conrad used it in "Youth": "You fellows know those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence." Thornton Wilder used it in his beautiful and outstanding novel, "The Bridge of San Luis Rey." A priest is coming through the Peruvian mountains; he sees a bridge fall and fling "five gesticulating ants" into the valley. He wonders whether there is any plan in a universe which permits such an "accident." The novel which follows narrates the dominating facts about each life that was snuffed out and each chapter constitutes a perfect short story built about one character. Then the book as a whole is

given both unity and significance in two philosophical chapters at the end, in which the priest and the abbess state their conclusions about the plan of the universe. This method of treatment gives a beautiful sense of rounded structure as well as integration. It is particularly adapted to the short story.

To Summarize: The beginning of a short story is vitally important from the standpoint of getting the reader's attention. It is also important artistically in that it sets the mood. The best way to find the true beginning of a story is to note at what point the interest in the present situation begins to rise. Structurally the beginning is important in that it introduces the reader to the characters and to the important situations giving rise to the action. While long descriptions are dangerous in that many readers dislike them, descriptive material is often massed at the opening which, generally speaking, emphasizes the most important story element.

CHAPTER XV

THE CREATIVE PERSONALITY

We have discussed the value of a study of normal human personality in Chapter X. There is also the creative personality—which has in it some element that we call "genius." Where does this mystical thing, "inspiration" come from?

There are several ways in which to study the creative personality: actual personal contact with writers; study of their journals, biographies and autobiographies and their writings; and study of the books which have been written about genius. This kind of study contains many values: it enhances one's literary enjoyment of any author's work, and it enhances one's knowledge of the writing process.

Personality and Style

The teacher is well aware of the close relationship between personality and style. I am using the word "style" now in the larger sense; an author's style is both his subject-matter—what he is sensitive to and interested in—and his manner of expressing it. The thing is obvious, the effect of personality is perfectly clear, so clear that one often wonders if the teacher can judge the manuscript of a student whom he knows personally through class or conference work, as it should be judged—in other words, as the editor a thousand

miles away would judge it. For instance, the young girl who writes highly entertaining and illuminating stories of the ultra-sophisticated high school flapper, *is* that sort of person. One knows it when one looks at her; one hears it when she talks. Her individuality expresses itself unmistakably, alike for the instructor and the other members of a class. Her work expresses exactly the same thing. But her associates in the class have often wondered just *how* strongly an editor not seeing or hearing her would feel it. They feel pretty sure that he would get a definite and clear impression. The same thing is true of the idealistic, highly sensitive Jewish boy who writes beautiful stories about his own people; it is true of the cheap shoddy woman who is out for a new sex thrill every few weeks. In other words—fiction reveals the personality of the writer.

Read the Journals of Authors

If you doubt this statement, check up by reading some of the journals and autobiographies of authors. They reveal the inner urges, the struggles, the mental and emotional processes lying back of the creative life. Reading them one realizes that growth and achievement are the result of struggle and disaster, of hard work and bitter disappointment. It would be difficult to find instances of high talent functioning creatively in the calm, effortless lives of easy-going people. One is always impressed by the extent to which geniuses have suffered from ill-health and poverty, or both. There is an intimate relationship between suffering, struggle, and their resulting *tension* and creative output. A list of books that reveal this sort of thing is

given in the Bibliography. It is by no means exhaustive; it simply mentions a few recent books that have interested the author of this text.

Literature Offers Escape from Life

The "escape theory" of the psychologists offers one of the most plausible explanations of what really happens in the creation of literature. One of the best books on this subject is "Dead Reckonings in Fiction" (already cited), by Brewster and Burrell. It states the theory clearly and convincingly and then gives ample illustration from the lives and works of several authors, including Tchekhov, Henry James, Katherine Mansfield, Conrad, Dostoevsky, and May Sinclair.

We suffer from major psychic frustrations: out of them we have evolved the "universal language of healing which we call art." Addiction to day-dreams and art—not to mention alcohol—is due to the failure to secure wish-fulfillments and the need to escape from the universe that baffles us and drives us into one more satisfactory, one with greater clarity, order, beauty, proportion, meaning—a harmonized universe.

The application of this theory is delightfully various. Applied to the artist it reveals the source of his inspiration in his frustrated impulses.

. . . . .

There may be such subtle interaction between literature and life that it is almost impossible to resolve them into separate elements. The more one becomes involved both with literature and with life, the more puzzling, intricate and fascinating such interrelationships become. For one returns to the actual universe after the temporary escape—to actual experience after the holiday of vicarious experience.

. . . . .

Literature also enables the reader to escape, and serves to intensify his capacity for more sensitive experience. We puzzle over the people we know; we hurt them, or fail them, or misinterpret them or most often just miss them altogether. And so we go to fiction, to the imagined human beings "the consolers of our inevitable separate loneliness." There we find fullness and coherence and fascinatingly plausible interpretations of motives and acts; we gain in Conrad's words, "a conviction of our fellowmen's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality."[1]

In other words, the "escape theory" can be applied to both writer and reader. Search your own soul and see whether or not it is valid. There are, of course, many theories about the creative impulse in art, many stimulating books. Just how directly helpful they are to the individual writer is difficult to say; but they should open up fascinating avenues of thought.

Let Your "Deep Self" Write

"Even the people who have it do not definitely know what genius is," says Mary Austin in "Everyman's Genius." Miss Austin believes that genius can be acquired and admits that probably she is the only person in the world that does so believe! She forgets, however, some of the more advanced behaviorists who question the heredity of any mental traits and even of instincts themselves. But whether genius can be acquired or not, the theory that it can is a good one, practically speaking. It is encouraging, to say the least, to all

[1] Brewster and Burrell, *Dead Reckonings in Fiction.* Quoted by permission of the publishers, Longmans, Green & Co.

who want to write and are willing to pay the penalty necessary to the acquisition.

Miss Austin says:

> Genius shows itself in the individual by the sudden appearance of ideas and concepts, often of the greatest complexity, seeming to come not by way of observation or cogitation, but from somewhere above or beyond him. . . . Modern psychology calls this the "deep self," the accumulated emotional and conceptual experience of the race, expressing itself through the individual as the "race mind." [2]

The author has delved rather deeply into the processes of creative writing and she draws upon her own experience both as an author and as a dweller in the Mohave desert, where she had intimate contact with primitive Indian and white minds; she also gives statements from creative geniuses of a number of different types. She is very emphatic about one's attitude toward experience:

Try to Understand Your Experience

Let the experience have way with you, not going through it timidly groping with one hand and protecting yourself with the other, but with full speed ahead, trusting to the vitality thus generated to carry you through successfully, not in the degree of its pleasantness, but in the degree to which it illuminates the participant.

Make an effort to understand your experience, if not while you are going through it, at least afterward. And in this understanding, include all the people who have been associated with you in that experience, their reactions to it, and its final result upon their lives. Also see yourself as these other par-

[2] Mary Austin, *Everyman's Genius*. Quoted with the permission of the publishers, Bobbs-Merrill Co.

ticipants see you, and as you are seen by the spectators of your experience. Consider no experience complete until it has been treated in this manner.

Never shirk an experience because its reactions or its results turn out to be other than you expected. Go through with it, and hold on to it as long as necessary to understand it, but never one instant longer; letting go an experience personally being indispensable to using it impersonally. Use of an experience while it is acutely personal is never profitable.

Identify your experience with the experiences of other people, or with the experiences treated of in great works of art—this is how Pere Goriot felt, crushing his silver porringer—this is what made Cleopatra desert Antony in the sea fight—this is what Wagner expressed in the opening movement of Siegfried. Also in your own work, try to recover the thread of an experience which you may unconsciously have been using.[3]

Get the Impersonal Angle on Experience

Excellent advice this, particularly that relating to the use of experience while it is personal. Testimony seems to be rather universal on this point—one cannot write about the things that are happening while one is *in them*. It is vitally important to get away from them and get perspective on them. In no other way can the objective point of view be gained; and that point of view is absolutely necessary.

A young man writes a careful description of his stream of consciousness as he lies on his bed in the twilight and lets his mind roam without restraint, trying to catch the things that are in his subconscious self and the images that are suggested by the sounds and

[3] Mary Austin, *Everyman's Genius*. Quoted with the permission of the publishers, Bobbs-Merrill Co.

shadows. The sketch that he produces as a result of this experience is practically worthless, in spite of his effort to be sincere and honest. Why? Simply because he has written subjectively, without any effort to identify his experience with the experience of the race. He shows the confused ramblings of a young mind, but they have no special meaning or significance. The young man has, as Miss Austin would say, "the craving for communication, the tormenting desire to tell," which is "merely the emotional register of the inward drive which is indispensable to all creative successes." But he makes the fatal mistake of not getting away from his experience and not seeing its larger, broader meanings. That is the trouble most often when students attempt to write of their own mental and emotional processes. Any group of workers can be made to do this sort of writing and it is good for them to do it; but it is only the few who are able to attain what Conrad calls the "solidarity . . . which binds together all humanity." Only the artist "speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation." [4]

Some Theories About Stimulation

"Genius and Disaster" [5] is the title of a very interesting book by Jeanette Marks, dealing with the apparent relationship between several actually disastrous

[4] Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus,* Doubleday, Doran and Company.

[5] Jeanette Marks, *Genius and Disaster,* Greenberg.

forms of goad or stimulus and literary production. Her book, like that of Arthur C. Jacobson [6] who follows her, develops the idea that there is a sort of "chemistry of genius." The toxins of tuberculosis, for instance, seem to have a directly stimulating power. A great many of the world's greatest artists have had the disease at one time or another. Both writers produce a rather imposing amount of evidence on this point.

Mr. Jacobson believes that "genius may reside in the secondary personality of a person of superior mental endowment. . . . The genius is a superman whose creative spirit resides, *not* in the primary self, but in this *secondary personality*"—which is often artificially released, as it were.

For the mature student, these two books will present a most interesting point of view, both challenging and dangerous socially.

To Summarize: The study of the personality of authors is fruitful both from the standpoint of literary appreciation and from that of production. There is a clear and definite relationship between personality and style; one feels this in intercourse with authors, either personally or through their books or journals. Another interesting field of study lies in the researches conducted by people who have approached the subject of genius scientifically. The science is in its infancy, but there seems to be unanimous agreement on the importance of a secondary or unconscious self which rises to the surface and produces work that is super-normal. It is important for you as a writer to try to make full

[6] Arthur C. Jacobson, *Genius,* Greenberg.

use of all your subconscious as well as your conscious experience; to develop your "inner" or "deep" or secondary personality as far as possible. This personality, mystical as it may seem to some of us, is rather generally recognized as an important factor in all forms of creative art.

CHAPTER XVI

THINGS TO AVOID

In writing, as in talking, many people have a tendency toward *obviousness*—putting into words things that an ordinary intelligence can grasp without explanation. The habit of giving unnecessary details and that of explaining what is already clear, are both forms of this vice. You must, after all, give your reader credit for ability to read something between the lines. For example: "She came panting up the stairs, her face scarlet, her hat askew. She was out of breath." The last sentence is, of course, superfluous. It only weakens the paragraph. It irritates the reader.

Putting Aunt Beryl into a story like "The Doll's House," the crude writer might comment upon her thus: "Aunt Beryl was very angry but it was not so much on account of the Kelveys children as because she was afraid of Willie Brent. Aunt Beryl took her feelings out on other people. Moreover she had a cruel streak in her nature, etc., etc." Compare this with Katherine Mansfield's subtlety and you have gained some understanding of a fundamental principle in fiction writing.

Do Not Intrude Yourself

The intrusion of the author is another vice. You are telling a story in which characters and events should speak for themselves. As a rule, it is better not to comment. By doing so, you immediately remind the

reader that *you are there,* telling a story which is merely fiction. Perhaps your heroine has done something foolish; very well, let her be foolish, and let your reader grasp that fact for himself. Do not commit the folly of saying, "She was foolish in thinking that this plan would work." You not only intrude yourself and thus momentarily destroy the illusion of reality, but you offend your reader's intelligence.

Avoid Wordiness

President Bryan of Indiana University once said that no speech was ever made that could not have been shortened to advantage. Probably no story was ever written that did not contain some unnecessary words. The more of an amateur the author is, the more certain he is to clutter up his manuscript with words that are either superfluous or actually harmful to the effect. This vice runs the gamut of imbecility, somewhat as follows: "I had occasion to be present at and to witness the ceremony." Or, less blatant but still wordy, "I had occasion to be present at the ceremony." The author should have said, simply, "I attended the ceremony." Unless, perchance he was trying to portray a character of the tiresome and highly stilted type! Such a *character* might well use the first form.

Any writer will profit by the experience of going through his manuscript mechanically, with a view to eliminating unnecessary words and phrases. Most of us have this fault in varying degrees.

Avoid Stilted Language

Wordiness and overdecoration of phraseology was more a vice of writers of the past generation than it

is of those of today. The Victorians were fond of high-sounding phrases, of "rich diction applied to a plain subject, or lofty words to a weak idea." The "harder," more matter-of-fact generation of today has no time for such cluttered reading. It is significant that elderly students taking extension courses often use the vocabulary and "style" of our grandmothers. Their writing is "fine" as the rhetoric books say. And to that extent it is old-fashioned and not marketable.

Amateurs as well as elderly ladies are prone to this fault. They often use inappropriate comparison in figures of speech; for example: "She was as angry as the ocean in a northeast storm." Or, while the comparison may be appropriate, the writer does not maintain it consistently. He says: "A sea of people greeted him as he came on the campus, shouting and whirling." The mixture of ideas is ridiculous; a sea does not shout or whirl. The writer would not have used the expression if he had visualized the images he was conveying to his readers.

Look Out for the Passive

The use of the awkward passive is another vice of the amateur. As a general rule, avoid the passive whenever possible. It is always weak in comparison with the active voice and it is likely to be downright awkward: for instance, "He wrote me a letter which will never be forgotten." How much better to say, "He wrote me a letter which I can never forget." The passive voice is weak because it is impersonal and lacking in action. Do not use it.

The Dangling Phrase or Clause

Another common fault is the use of what the English composition books call, "a dangling clause"—or phrase. "While walking over the hill, the house came into view." Who walked over the hill? The house? Preposterous! The sentence should read, "As I walked over the hill, the house came into view."

The Literary "Thank-You-Ma'am"

Beware the abrupt transition from one *line* of *thought* to another, from one *character's mind* to another's, from one *scene* to another, from one *place* to another, from one *time* to another. It is bad business to jump from a scene with your heroine in her home to one with your hero in his home, without some sort of *transitional* sentence like, "In the meantime Mary was doing thus and so." A simple device of this sort at the opening of the new paragraph slides the reader into the new without his becoming conscious of the shift.

The failure to use proper transitional phrases or sentences is responsible for much direct loss in the reality of the story. When you switch your reader from Mary to John you must do it, in some way or other, without making him wonder how he got there; when you begin with what Mary is thinking and then suddenly tell what John is thinking, let your reader into John's mind gently. As we have pointed out in the chapter on "The Angle of Narration," you have to select a reflecting mind and stick to it as far as possible; if you must change, change gracefully. Some-

times the change is in itself so great that introductory phrases will not do and the only device open to the writer is a frank use of asterisks, or wider space between paragraphs. The way to avoid the literary "thank-you-ma'am" is to go through your manuscript when it is completed, watching for the bumps and religiously eliminating them by the proper use of transitional material.

Titles Are Important

Much depends upon your choice of title. The title has two functions: first, to lure the reader into reading the story; second, to characterize the story. It must suggest without revealing too much; it must arouse interest, stimulate the imagination, and yet keep the surprise. It should never mislead or fool the reader. The best way to select a title, unless you have actually written your story around one, is to go through the manuscript looking for the one phrase that expresses the spirit of the story; the apt phrase. No matter how difficult or complex the situation, there is generally a sentence that contains the kernel of the story. One needs only to hunt for it.

Proverbs and Biblical phrases and quotations are rich in connotation and for that reason are often used in titles. Such use draws upon the accumulated, traditional meaning of the phrase. It has about the same meaning for all English-speaking, Christian and Jewish people. Hence its value. The following titles have Biblical origins: "A Certain Rich Man," "The Fruit of the Tree," "The Inside of the Cup," "The Street

Called Straight," "The Cheerful Giver," "They That Walk in Darkness," and "As a Man Thinketh."

To Summarize: The student is warned against obviousness, the intrusion of himself, wordiness, stilted language, the passive voice, the dangling clause, the poor title, and the "thank-you-ma'am." In warning him against these errors, the author has merely taken some of the most common mistakes under consideration. There are countless other weaknesses in composition to which the untrained writer is subject, particularly if he has not had the benefit of a regular course in English composition.

Do You Express Yourself Well?

Excellent courses are given by mail under the auspices of standard universities; they are also given in "university extension centers" in most large cities nowadays. If it is impossible to secure university training in writing, the next best thing is the study of some good textbook giving the important rules of grammar and rhetoric. Too often, beginners in short story writing are quite sure of their ability to write correctly and fluently when in reality their writing is atrocious. The way to find out how you stand as regards ability to use your main tool, the English language, is to have your story read by some high-class and perfectly honest professional critic. If you cannot get such criticism from a university instructor, and usually this can be arranged, consult a high school teacher of English.

One thing is certain: it is rank folly to attempt to market manuscripts before you have a fair mastery

of your tools—words and phrases. The writer who sends editors manuscripts loaded with grammatical errors and other forms of crudeness marks himself as presumptuous; he does not deserve to succeed because he has not taken the trouble to prepare himself for his work.

CHAPTER XVII

MARKETING

Many stories fail to be published simply because their authors do not persist in the effort to market them; they may be really good, but are sent to one or two editors and then, upon rejection, allowed to mould in a desk. If you have a story that you believe to be good, even as good as the average second or third-rate magazine story, why not make a really systematic effort to sell it.

Keep on Trying

Why be discouraged by one or two rejections? Obstacles are not conquered by people who fail to make determined effort to sell themselves and their work. Refusals are the rule, not the exception, for most beginners; only in the rarest instances do first stories sell to first editors. The histories of practically all writers are full of testimony to the fact that marketing manuscripts takes perseverance and determination. Stories often sell to the tenth, eighteenth, even twenty-ninth editor to whom they are sent! There is absolutely no question about it: one or two or even five refusals do not necessarily mean that a story will not finally sell.

The Literary Agents

Many beginners as well as successful writers find it advantageous to employ literary agents for the market-

ing of manuscripts. As a rule, these agents will read manuscripts for a nominal fee, say three or five dollars, and will then, if they have confidence in the story, attempt to market it upon a percentage basis. If a literary agent sees no chance for your story, you do well to view it with some doubt. Only, be sure your agent is reliable. Some of these agents are highly expert; they know the market and the avenues of approach to editors better than a writer possibly can. The sensible thing seems to be to first try your luck directly with the editors, after a careful study of each editor's taste in fiction. Do not send a wild-west blood and thunder story to the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly;* you might try it on *Adventure* and be successful. Do not send a sex story to *The Youth's Companion,* but try the *Cosmopolitan* or *Snappy Stories. The Forum,* or *Harper's,* or *Scribner's,* or *The Century* are far more likely to take a story of the subtle Katherine Mansfield type than is *The Saturday Evening Post* which is supposed to please the tired business man; as a matter of fact it pleases other types of reader as well, but it does not, as a rule, go in for highly artistic subtleties.

Then, failing to market your manuscript yourself, try some of the professional agents. They may succeed with the very magazines which have returned your story, because they have access to the higher-ups in the publishing organization and know their tastes. Above all, do not commit the folly of regarding yourself as a genius whose work is not recognized; and of regarding editors as blind or prejudiced obstacles to your career. Real genius is recognized. Editors are on tip-toe to find and get control of the work of

promising writers. Any editor will tell you that. Otherwise why all the contests for good stories? Why the *Forum* contest on first short stories? Why the assertion of a representative of a large publishing house that it actually buys poor novels of promising new writers in the hope that they will some day write good ones?

If genius is not recognized, it is, nine times out of ten, because genius has not done its part in making itself known to editors. It has probably tried feebly once or twice and then grown discouraged and abandoned the manuscript. There are, after all, hundreds of manuscripts going over the desks each day in any magazine office. This tremendous competition means that good ones may be overlooked in the rush; there are relays of readers, assistants, and final judges. But if you keep on trying, and your work is really worth anything, you will eventually find the reader and the editor who recognize your ability.

At first you will probably receive printed rejection slips; then sometimes you will be honored with a really personal letter, asking you to submit something else; or even giving you a bit of criticism or advice. If you are lucky enough to gain that much editorial attention, you may well feel encouraged, and you will, of course, give very serious consideration to the advice. But you must keep your faith in editors and in your own final ability. There is no other way to succeed.

TYPICAL SHORT STORIES

THE KILLERS[1]

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

The door of Henry's lunch room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.

"What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."

Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched them. He had been talking to George when they came in.

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potato," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."

George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.

"It's five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.

"It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

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[1] From *Men Without Women*, copyright 1927, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

"That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it."

"I can give you ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver ——"

"I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore a silk muffler and gloves.

"Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat leaning forward, their elbows on the counter.

"Got anything to drink?" Al asked.

"Silver beer, bevo, ginger ale," George said.

"I mean you got anything to drink?"

"Just those I said."

"This is a hot town," said the other. "What do they call it?"

"Summit."

"Ever hear of it?" Al asked his friend.

"No," said the friend.

"What do you do here nights?" Al asked.

"They eat the dinner," his friend said. "They all come here and eat the big dinner."

"That's right," George said.

"So you think that's right?" Al asked George.

"Sure."

"You're a pretty bright boy, aren't you?"

"Sure," said George.

"Well, you're not," said the other little man. "Is he, Al?"

"He's dumb," said Al. He turned to Nick. "What's your name?"

"Adams."

"Another bright boy," Al said. "Ain't he a bright boy, Max?"

"The town's full of bright boys," Max said.

George put the two platters, one of ham and eggs, the other of bacon and eggs, on the counter. He set down two side dishes of fried potatoes and closed the wicket into the kitchen.

"Which is yours?" he asked Al.

"Don't you remember?"

"Ham and eggs."

"Just a bright boy," Max said. He leaned forward and took the ham and eggs. Both men ate with their gloves on. George watched them eat.

"What are *you* looking at?" Max looked at George.

"Nothing."

"The hell you were. You were looking at me."

"Maybe the boy meant it for a joke, Max," Al said.

George laughed.

"*You* don't have to laugh," Max said to him. "*You* don't have to laugh at all, see?"

"All right," said George.

"So he thinks it's all right." Max turned to Al. "He thinks it's all right. That's a good one."

"Oh, he's a thinker," Al said. They went on eating.

"What's the bright boy's name down the counter?" Al asked Max.

"Hey, bright boy," Max said to Nick. "You go around on the other side of the counter with your boy friend."

"What's the idea?" Nick asked.

"There isn't any idea."

"You better go around, bright boy," Al said. Nick went around behind the counter.

"What's the idea?" George asked.

"None of your damn business," Al said. "Who's out in the kitchen?"

"The nigger."

"What do you mean the nigger?"

"The nigger that cooks."

"Tell him to come in."

"What's the idea?"

"Tell him to come in."

"Where do you think you are?"

"We know damn well where we are," the man called Max said. "Do we look silly?"

"You talk silly," Al said to him. "What the hell do you argue with this kid for? Listen," he said to George, "tell the nigger to come out here."

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing. Use your head, bright boy. What would we do to a nigger?"

George opened the slit that opened back into the kitchen. "Sam," he called. "Come in here a minute."

The door to the kitchen opened and the nigger came in. "What was it?" he asked. The two men at the counter took a look at him.

"All right, nigger. You stand right there," Al said.

Sam, the nigger, standing in his apron, looked at the two men sitting at the counter. "Yes, sir," he said. Al got down from his stool.

"I'm going back to the kitchen with the nigger and bright boy," he said. "Go on back to the kitchen, nigger. You go with him, bright boy." The little man walked after Nick and Sam, the cook, back into the kitchen. The door shut after them. The man called Max sat at the counter opposite George. He didn't look at George but looked in the mirror that ran along back of the counter.

Henry's had been made over from a saloon into a lunch-counter.

"Well, bright boy," Max said, looking into the mirror, "why don't you say something?"

"What's it all about?"

"Hey, Al," Max called, "bright boy wants to know what it's all about."

"Why don't you tell him?" Al's voice came from the kitchen.

"What do you think it's all about?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think?"

Max looked into the mirror all the time he was talking.

"I wouldn't say."

"Hey, Al, bright boy says he wouldn't say what he thinks it's all about."

"I can hear you, all right," Al said from the kitchen. He had propped open the slit that dishes passed through into the kitchen with a catsup bottle. "Listen, bright boy," he said from the kitchen to George. "Stand a little further along the bar. You move a little to the left, Max." He was like a photographer arranging for a group picture.

"Talk to me, bright boy?" Max said. "What do you think's going to happen?"

George did not say anything.

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Andreson?"

"Yes."

"He comes here to eat every night, don't he?"

"Sometimes he comes here."

"He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?"

"If he comes."

"We know all that, bright boy," Max said. "Talk about something else. Ever go to the movies?"

"Once in a while."

"You ought to go to the movies more. The movies are fine for a bright boy like you."

"What are you going to kill Ole Andreson for? What did he ever do to you?"

"He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us."

"And he's only going to see us once," Al said from the kitchen.

"What are you going to kill him for, then?" George asked.

"We're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend, bright boy."

"Shut up," said Al from the kitchen. "You talk too goddam much."

"Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don't I, bright boy?"

"You talk too damn much," Al said. "The nigger and my bright boy are amused by themselves. I got them tied up like a couple of girl friends in a convent."

"I suppose you were in a convent."

"You never know."

"You were in a kosher convent. That's where you were."

George looked up at the clock.

"If anybody comes in you tell them the cook is off, and if they keep after it, you tell them you'll go back and cook yourself. Do you get that, bright boy?"

"All right," George said. "What you going to do with us afterward?"

"That'll depend," Max said. "That's one of those things you never know at the time."

George looked up at the clock. It was a quarter past six. The door from the street opened. A street-car motorman came in.

"Hello, George," he said. "Can I get supper?"

"Sam's gone out," George said. "He'll be back in about half an hour."

"I'd better go up the street," the motorman said. George looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past six.

"That was nice, bright boy," Max said. "You're a regular little gentleman."

"He knew I'd blow his head off," Al said from the kitchen.

"No," said Max. "It ain't that. Bright boy is nice. He's a nice boy. I like him."

At six-fifty-five George said: "He's not coming."

Two other people had been in the lunch room. Once George had gone out to the kitchen and made a ham-and-egg sandwich "to go" that a man wanted to take with him. Inside the kitchen he saw Al, his derby hat tipped back, sitting on a stool beside the wicket with the muzzle of a sawed-off shot-gun resting on the ledge. Nick and the cook were back to back in the corner, a towel tied in each of their mouths. George had cooked the sandwich, wrapped it up in oiled paper, put it in a bag, brought it in, and the man had paid for it and gone out.

"Bright boy can do everything," Max said. "He can cook and everything. You'd make some girl a nice wife, bright boy."

"Yes?" George said. "Your friend, Ole Andreson, isn't going to come."

"We'll give him ten minutes," Max said.

Max watched the mirror and the clock. The hands of the clock marked seven o'clock, and then five minutes past seven.

"Come on, Al," said Max. "We better go. He's not coming."

"Better give him five minutes," Al said from the kitchen.

In the five minutes a man came in, and George explained that the cook was sick.

"Why the hell don't you get another cook?" the man asked. "Aren't you running a lunch counter?" He went out.

"Come on, Al," Max said.

"What about the two bright boys and the nigger?"

"They're all right."

"You think so?"

"Sure. We're through with it."

"I don't like it," said Al. "It's sloppy. You talk too much."

"Oh, what the hell," said Max. "We got to keep amused, haven't we?"

"You talk too much, all the same," Al said. He came out from the kitchen. The cut-off barrels of the shotgun made a slight bulge under the waist of his too tight-fitting overcoat. He straightened his coat with his gloved hands.

"So long, bright boy," he said to George. "You got a lot of luck."

"That's the truth," Max said. "You ought to play the races, bright boy."

The two of them went out the door. George watched them through the window pass under the arc light and cross the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team. George went back through the swinging door into the kitchen and untied Nick and the cook.

"I don't want any more of that," said Sam, the cook. "I don't want any more of that."

Nick stood up. He had never had a towel in his mouth before.

"Say," he said. "What the hell?" He was trying to swagger it off.

"They were going to kill Ole Andreson," George said. "They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat."

"Ole Andreson?"

"Sure."

The cook felt the corners of his mouth with his thumbs.

"They all gone?" he asked.

"Yeah," said George. "They're gone now."

"I don't like it," said the cook. "I don't like any of it at all."

"Listen," George said to Nick. "You better go see Ole Andreson."

"All right."

"You better not have anything to do with it at all," Sam, the cook, said. "You better stay way out of it."

"Don't go if you don't want to," George said.

"Mixing up in this ain't going to get you anywhere," the cook said. "You stay out of it."

"I'll go see him," Nick said to George. "Where does he live?"

The cook turned away.

"Little boys always know what they want to do," he said.

"He lives up at Hirsch's rooming house," George said to Nick.

"I'll go up there."

Outside the arc light shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car tracks and turned at the next arc light down a side street. Three houses up the street was Hirsch's rooming house. Nick walked up the two steps and pushed the bell. A woman came to the door.

"Is Ole Andreson here?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, if he's in."

Nick followed the woman up a flight of stairs and back to the end of a corridor. She knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's somebody to see you, Mr. Andreson," the woman said.

"It's Nick Adams."

"Come in."

Nick opened the door and went into the room. Ole Andreson was lying on the bed with all his clothes on. He had been a heavy-weight prizefighter and he was too long for the bed. He lay with his head on two pillows. He did not look at Nick.

"What was it?" he asked.

"I was up at Henry's," Nick said, "and two fellows came in and tied up me and the cook, and they said they were going to kill you."

It sounded silly when he said it. Ole Andreson said nothing.

"They put us out in the kitchen," Nick went on. "They were going to shoot you when you came in to supper."

Ole Andreson looked at the wall and did not say anything.

"George thought I better come and tell you about it."

"There isn't anything I can do about it," Ole Andreson said.

"I'll tell you what they were like."

"I don't want to know what they were like," Old Andreson said. He looked at the wall. "Thanks for coming to tell me about it."

"That's all right."

Nick looked at the big man lying on the bed.

"Don't you want me to go and see the police?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "That wouldn't do any good."

"Isn't there something I could do?"

"No. There ain't anything to do."

"Maybe it was just a bluff."

"No. It ain't just a bluff."

Ole Andreson rolled over toward the wall.

"The only thing is," he said, talking toward the wall, "I just can't make up my mind to go out. I been in here all day."

"Couldn't you get out of town?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "I'm through with all that running around."

He looked at the wall.

"There ain't anything to do now."

"Couldn't you fix it up some way?"

"No. I got in wrong." He talked in the same flat voice. "There ain't anything to do. After a while I'll make up my mind to go out."

"I better go back and see George," Nick said.

"So long," said Ole Andreson. He did not look toward Nick. "Thanks for coming around."

Nick went out. As he shut the door he saw Ole Andreson, with all his clothes on, lying on the bed looking at the wall.

"He's been in his room all day," the landlady said downstairs. "I guess he don't feel well. I said to him: 'Mr. Andreson, you ought to go out and take a walk on a nice fall day like this,' but he didn't feel like it."

"He doesn't want to go out."

"I'm sorry he don't feel well," the woman said. "He's an awfully nice man. He was in the ring, you know."

"I know it."

"You'd never know it except from the way his face is," the woman said. They stood talking just inside the street door. "He's just as gentle."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Hirsch," Nick said.

"I'm not Mrs. Hirsch," the woman said. "She owns the place. I just look after it for her. I'm Mrs. Bell."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Bell," Nick said.

"Good-night," the woman said.

Nick walked up the dark street to the corner under

the arc light, and then along the car tracks to Henry's eating house. George was inside, back of the counter.

"Did you see Ole?"

"Yes," said Nick. "He's in his room and he won't go out."

The cook opened the door from the kitchen when he heard Nick's voice.

"I don't even listen to it," he said, and shut the door.

"Did you tell him about it?" George asked.

"Sure. I told him, but he knows what it's all about."

"What's he going to do?"

"Nothing."

"They'll kill him."

"I guess they will."

"He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago."

"I guess so," said Nick.

"It's a hell of a thing."

"It's an awful thing," Nick said.

They did not say anything. George reached down for a towel and wiped the counter.

"I wonder what he did?" Nick said.

"Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for."

"I'm going to get out of this town," Nick said.

"Yes," said George. "That's a good thing to do."

"I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful."

"Well," said George, "you better not think about it."

THE DOLL'S HOUSE [1]

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

When dear old Mrs. Hay went back to town after staying with the Burnells she sent her children a doll's house. It was so big that the carter and Pat carried it into the courtyard, and there it stayed, propped up on two wooden boxes beside the feed-room door. No harm could come to it; it was summer. And perhaps the smell of paint would have gone off by the time it had to be taken in. For, really, the smell of paint coming from that doll's house ("Sweet of old Mrs. Hay, of course; most sweet and generous!")—but the smell of paint was quite enough to make any one seriously ill, in Aunt Beryl's opinion. Even before the sacking was taken off. And when it was. . . .

There stood the doll's house, a dark, oily, spinach green, picked out with bright yellow. Its two solid little chimneys, glued on to the roof, were painted red and white, and the door, gleaming with yellow varnish, was like a little slab of toffee. Four windows, real windows, were divided into panes by a broad streak of green. There was actually a tiny porch, too, painted yellow, with big lumps of congealed paint hanging along the edge.

But perfect, perfect little house! Who could possibly mind the smell? It was part of the joy, part of the newness.

"Open it quickly, some one!"

The hook at the side was stuck fast. Pat pried it

[1] Reprinted from *The Dove's Nest,* by Katherine Mansfield, by and with the permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publisher.

open with his penknife, and the whole house-front swung back, and—there you were, gazing at one and the same moment into the drawing-room and dining-room, the kitchen and two bedrooms. That is the way for a house to open! Why don't all houses open like that? How much more exciting than peering through the slit of a door into a mean little hall with a hatstand and two umbrellas! That is—isn't it?—what you long to know about a house when you put your hand on the knocker. Perhaps it is the way God opens houses at dead of night when He is taking a quiet turn with an angel. . . .

"O-oh!" The Burnell children sounded as though they were in despair. It was too marvellous; it was too much for them. They had never seen anything like it in their lives. All the rooms were papered. There were pictures on the walls, painted on the paper, with gold frames complete. Red carpet covered all the floors except the kitchen; red plush chairs in the drawing-room, green in the dining-room; tables, beds with real bedclothes, a cradle, a stove, a dresser with tiny plates and one big jug. But what Kezia liked more than anything, what she liked frightfully, was the lamp. It stood in the middle of the dining-room table, an exquisite little amber lamp with a white globe. It was even filled all ready for lighting, though, of course, you couldn't light it. But there was something inside that looked like oil, and that moved when you shook it.

The father and mother dolls, who sprawled very stiff as though they had fainted in the drawing-room, and their two little children asleep upstairs, were really too big for the doll's house. They didn't look as though they belonged. But the lamp was perfect. It seemed to smile at Kezia, to say, "I live here." The lamp was real.

The Burnell children could hardly walk to school fast enough the next morning. They burned to tell every-

body, to describe, to—well—to boast about their doll's house before the school-bell rang.

"I'm to tell," said Isabel, "because I'm the eldest. And you two can join in after. But I'm to tell first."

There was nothing to answer. Isabel was bossy, but she was always right, and Lottie and Kezia knew too well the powers that went with being eldest. They brushed through the thick buttercups at the road edge and said nothing.

"And I'm to choose who's to come and see it first. Mother said I might."

For it had been arranged that while the doll's house stood in the courtyard they might ask the girls at school, two at a time, to come and look. Not to stay to tea, of course, or to come traipsing through the house. But just to stand quietly in the courtyard while Isabel pointed out the beauties, and Lottie and Kezia looked pleased. . . .

But hurry as they might, by the time they had reached the tarred palings of the boys' playground the bell had begun to jangle. They only just had time to whip off their hats and fall into line before the roll was called. Never mind. Isabel tried to make up for it by looking very important and mysterious and by whispering behind her hand to the girls near her, "Got something to tell you at playtime."

Playtime came and Isabel was surrounded. The girls of her class nearly fought to put their arms round her, to walk away with her, to beam flatteringly, to be her special friend. She held quite a court under the huge pine trees at the side of the playground. Nudging, giggling together, the little girls pressed up close. And the only two who stayed outside the ring were the two who were always outside, the little Kelveys. They knew better than to come anywhere near the Burnells.

For the fact was, the school the Burnell children went

to was not at all the kind of place their parents would have chosen if there had been any choice. But there was none. It was the only school for miles. And the consequence was all the children in the neighbourhood, the Judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the storekeeper's children, the milkman's, were forced to mix together. Not to speak of there being an equal number of rude, rough little boys as well. But the line had to be drawn somewhere. It was drawn at the Kelveys. Many of the children, including the Burnells, were not allowed even to speak to them. They walked past the Kelveys with their heads in the air, and as they set the fashion in all matters of behaviour, the Kelveys were shunned by everybody. Even the teacher had a special voice for them, and a special smile for the other children when Lil Kelvey came up to her desk with a bunch of dreadfully common-looking flowers.

They were the daughters of a spry, hardworking little washerwoman, who went about from house to house by the day. This was awful enough. But where was Mr. Kelvey? Nobody knew for certain. But everybody said he was in prison. So they were the daughters of a washerwoman and a gaolbird. Very nice company for other people's children! And they looked it. Why Mrs. Kelvey made them so conspicuous was hard to understand. The truth was they were dressed in "bits" given to her by the people for whom she worked. Lil, for instance, who was a stout, plain child, with big freckles, came to school in a dress made from a green art-serge table-cloth of the Burnells', with red plush sleeves from the Logans' curtains. Her hat, perched on top of her high forehead, was a grown-up woman's hat, once the property of Miss Lecky, the postmistress. It was turned up at the back and trimmed with a large scarlet quill. What a little guy she looked! It was impossible not to laugh. And

her little sister, our Else, wore a long white dress, rather like a nightgown, and a pair of little boy's boots. But whatever our Else wore she would have looked strange. She was a tiny wishbone of a child, with cropped hair and enormous solemn eyes—a little white owl. Nobody had ever seen her smile; she scarcely ever spoke. She went through life holding on to Lil, with a piece of Lil's skirt screwed up in her hand. Where Lil went our Else followed. In the playground, on the road going to and from school, there was Lil marching in front and our Else holding on behind. Only when she wanted anything, or when she was out of breath, our Else gave Lil a tug, a twitch, and Lil stopped and turned round. The Kelveys never failed to understand each other.

Now they hovered at the edge; you couldn't stop them listening. When the little girls turned round and sneered, Lil, as usual, gave her silly, shamefaced smile, but our Else only looked.

And Isabel's voice, so very proud, went on telling. The carpet made a great sensation, but so did the beds with real bedclothes, and the stove with an oven door.

When she finished Kezia broke in. "You've forgotten the lamp, Isabel."

"Oh, yes," said Isabel, "and there's a teeny little lamp, all made of yellow glass, with a white globe that stands on the dining-room table. You couldn't tell it from a real one."

"The lamp's best of all," cried Kezia. She thought Isabel wasn't making half enough of the little lamp. But nobody paid any attention. Isabel was choosing the two who were to come back with them that afternoon and see it. She chose Emmie Cole and Lena Logan. But when the others knew they were all to have a chance, they couldn't be nice enough to Isabel. One by one they put their arms round Isabel's waist and walked her off. They

had something to whisper to her, a secret. "Isabel's *my* friend."

Only the little Kelveys moved away forgotten; there was nothing more for them to hear.

Days passed, and as more children saw the doll's house, the fame of it spread. It became the one subject, the rage. The one question was, "Have you seen Burnells' doll's house? Oh, ain't it lovely!" "Haven't you seen it? Oh, I say!"

Even the dinner hour was given up to talking about it. The little girls sat under the pines eating their thick mutton sandwiches and big slabs of johnny cake spread with butter. While always, as near as they could get, sat the Kelveys, our Else holding on to Lil, listening too, while they chewed their jam sandwiches out of a newspaper soaked with large red blobs. . . .

"Mother," said Kezia, "can't I ask the Kelveys just once?"

"Certainly not, Kezia."

"But why not?"

"Run away, Kezia; you know quite well why not."

At last everybody had seen it except them. On that day the subject rather flagged. It was the dinner hour. The children stood together under the pine trees, and suddenly, as they looked at the Kelveys eating out of their paper, always by themselves, always listening, they wanted to be horrid to them. Emmie Cole started the whisper.

"Lil Kelvey's going to be a servant when she grows up."

"O-oh, how awful!" said Isabel Burnell, and she made eyes at Emmie.

Emmie swallowed in a very meaning way and nodded to Isabel as she'd seen her mother do on those occasions.

"It's true—it's true—it's true," she said.

Then Lena Logan's little eyes snapped. "Shall I ask her?" she whispered.

"Bet you don't," said Jessie May.

"Pooh, I'm not frightened," said Lena. Suddenly she gave a little squeal and danced in front of the other girls. "Watch! Watch me! Watch me now!" said Lena. And sliding, gliding, dragging one foot, giggling behind her hand, Lena went over to the Kelveys.

Lil looked up from her dinner. She wrapped the rest quickly away. Our Else stopped chewing. What was coming now?

"Is it true you're going to be a servant when you grow up, Lil Kelvey?" shrilled Lena.

Dead silence. But instead of answering, Lil only gave her silly, shamefaced smile. She didn't seem to mind the question at all. What a sell for Lena! The girls began to titter.

Lena couldn't stand that. She put her hands on her hips; she shot forward. "Yah, yer father's in prison!" she hissed, spitefully.

This was such a marvellous thing to have said that the little girls rushed away in a body, deeply, deeply excited, wild with joy. Some one found a long rope, and they began skipping. And never did they skip so high, run in and out so fast, or do such daring things as on that morning.

In the afternoon Pat called for the Burnell children with the buggy and they drove home. There were visitors. Isabel and Lottie, who liked visitors, went upstairs to change their pinafores. But Kezia thieved out at the back. Nobody was about; she began to swing on the big white gates of the courtyard. Presently, looking along the road, she saw two little dots. They grew bigger, they were coming towards her. Now she could see that one was in front and one close behind. Now she could see that they were the Kelveys. Kezia stopped swinging.

She slipped off the gate as if she was going to run away. Then she hesitated. The Kelveys came nearer, and beside them walked their shadows, very long, stretching right across the road with their heads in the buttercups. Kezia clambered back on the gate; she had made up her mind; she swung out.

"Hullo," she said to the passing Kelveys.

They were so astounded that they stopped. Lil gave her silly smile. Our Else stared.

"You can come and see our doll's house if you want to," said Kezia, and she dragged one toe on the ground. But at that Lil turned red and shook her head quickly.

"Why not?" asked Kezia.

Lil gasped, then she said, "Your ma told our ma you wasn't to speak to us."

"Oh, well," said Kezia. She didn't know what to reply. "It doesn't matter. You can come and see our doll's house all the same. Come on. Nobody's looking."

But Lil shook her head still harder.

"Don't you want to?" asked Kezia.

Suddenly there was a twitch, a tug at Lil's skirt. She turned round. Our Else was looking at her with big, imploring eyes; she was frowning; she wanted to go. For a moment Lil looked at our Else very doubtfully. But then our Else twitched her skirt again. She started forward. Kezia led the way. Like two little stray cats they followed across the courtyard to where the doll's house stood.

"There it is," said Kezia.

There was a pause. Lil breathed loudly, almost snorted; our Else was still as a stone.

"I'll open it for you," said Kezia kindly. She undid the hook and they looked inside.

"There's the drawing-room and the dining-room, and that's the ——"

"Kezia!"

Oh, what a start they gave!

"Kezia!"

It was Aunt Beryl's voice. They turned round. At the back door stood Aunt Beryl, staring as if she couldn't believe what she saw.

"How dare you ask the little Kelveys into the courtyard?" said her cold, furious voice. "You know as well as I do, you're not allowed to talk to them. Run away, children, run away at once. And don't come back again," said Aunt Beryl. And she stepped into the yard and shooed them out as if they were chickens.

"Off you go immediately!" she called, cold and proud.

They did not need telling twice. Burning with shame, shrinking together, Lil huddling along like her mother, our Else dazed, somehow they crossed the big courtyard and squeezed through the white gate.

"Wicked, disobedient little girl!" said Aunt Beryl bitterly to Kezia, and she slammed the doll's house to.

The afternoon had been awful. A letter had come from Willie Brent, a terrifying, threatening letter, saying if she did not meet him that evening in Pulman's Bush, he'd come to the front door and ask the reason why! But now that she had frightened those little rats of Kelveys and given Kezia good scolding, her heart felt lighter. That ghastly pressure was gone. She went back to the house humming.

When the Kelveys were well out of sight of Burnells', they sat down to rest on a big red drain-pipe by the side of the road. Lil's cheeks were still burning; she took off the hat with the quill and held it on her knee. Dreamily they looked over the hay paddocks, past the creek, to the group of wattles where Logan's cows stood waiting to be milked. What were their thoughts?

Presently our Else nudged up close to her sister. But

now she had forgotten the cross lady. She put out a finger and stroked her sister's quill; she smiled her rare smile.

"I seen the little lamp," she said, softly.

Then both were silent once more.

SIX DOLLARS[1]

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

When Tansy Snow was a young man of eighteen or nineteen he went one night to the Stone Fold. The Stone Fold is an islet lying about two miles to the southeast of us. There is a house on it built of stones, and a sheep-shelter, and toward the southern end three thorn-trees.

Tansy took his father's skiff and steered straight through the shoals that lie that way, guided by the lamp in the garret of the house. Donna, who had been in town with her father two days before told him she would put it there when the old man was asleep and the dogs shut up.

Donna Salisbury wasn't pretty. And she would have been better for a mother's care; better to look at. As you'd expect, living with only a shepherd father, her clothes were heavy, stout things, fitted mostly by guess, and none too clean, and her hair was thick and untended, and the color of her father's sheep. But she was strong, stronger than a boy, and if her face had a dull look, there was something behind the dullness that would make a fellow stop to look again, especially when stars were bright enough to cast shadows among the rocks and the gray grass.

Tansy couldn't understand why he should want to have anything to do with her. He'd been to the Academy and now he had a position in the new bank; he had to wear decent clothes every day, clean collars, and polished boots; it went deeper than that: he had every day

[1] From *Urkey Island*, by Wilbur Daniel Steele, Harcourt, Brace & Co. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

to be a decent *man* and wear a clean conscience; otherwise the pointing finger of the banking business would find him out—bound to—in the long run of a man's life.

He had been to the Stone Fold three times, steering by the light. This time he was coming simply to say he wasn't coming. It would be awkward telling the girl. For a day and a night he had been busy trying to think up something humane but at the same time final. Finished. Chopped off.

He hadn't guessed how awkward it would be, after all. They couldn't talk there on the beach on account of the dogs; they had to go along a way. Occasional clouds, great fluffs of things, sailed over the sky, and in the dark when they covered the stars Donna led him, taking his fingers in her strong, dull, warm, eager hand.

He would have said it at the first turn of the shore, but the surf on the bar there was too loud; he didn't want to shout. He would have said it when they started inland toward the thorn-trees, but now they had got into the wind. the full weight of the wind that came in from the open sea and bore the great clouds among the stars and made a living sound among the grasses. He would have said it under the thorn-tree, but under the thorn-tree was Donna.

It was half past two when he left the island, and he hadn't said it yet. What he *had* said he could hardly remember. Sometimes words, fragments of sentences, promises, will come from a man's mouth as if it were some one else speaking: things he doesn't mean at all.

He pushed the skiff off the sand, holding it by the painter.

"When'll you be again?" she whispered.

Now was the time to tell her. She might have seen how pale he was; might have helped him by saying something. But she was a dumb young thing and she hadn't a word. Of a sudden he reached into his pocket and

pulled out the money he had there and thrust it into her hands.

She was a dumb one, and she couldn't make it out.

"What's this?"

"I want you should buy yourself some present or other."

"Huh?"

The dogs in the sheepfold began to bark. Tansy jumped into the skiff and pushed off, leaving Donna to stand there, dumber than ever.

He had a fair wind back and put up the sail.

It was six dollars he had given her, a lot of money, the whole of his first week's wages. There were things he could have bought with that: a new tire for his bicycle, and a Young People's Union pin to give Elsie Baker on her birthday. But it was all right. Better to start off clear—not a debt outstanding—no matter what the cost might be.

Even yet, though, he didn't feel quite right. When he got home and up to his room he had three hours to sleep, but he couldn't sleep. He was disgusted with himself. His memory reviewed the night with shame and loathing. He saw the path down which he had started, and even if he had got out of it now, it was digusting to remember.

All next day he felt drugged and haggard. He made mistakes with figures, so that Mr. Matheson had to speak to him. But what was it? He'd paid, hadn't he? Squared up? Given everything he had to the girl?

Yes, but how about the Lord God? Slowly, as the day went by, he saw this. You can't pay God with money.

There was a sociable at Center Church that night. He had asked to see Elsie Baker home. He looked so ill at supper-time that his mother advised him to stay in. To her surprise he acquiesced without trouble. He went

upstairs. When he was half undressed for bed, however, he couldn't do it. Getting dressed again, he stole out the back way and went and stood behind a tree near the church and watched the people going in.

The windows were bright and there were sounds of a good time, a hymn, then after a decent interval laughter and runnings about, games. Tansy walked across the street and stood at the steps.

He had given the girl everything he had. Can you give more than you have? And, anyway, any girl that would do that!

Yes, yes; but how about the Lord God?

He went around to the wagon-shed, and in the dark there he fell on his knees. "O Heavenly Father, I've walked in evil; I've committed a grievous sin; I beg Thee to forgive me in Thy mercy. I repent. O God, I repent; I do, I do, honestly! Honestly, God, honestly ——"

In the church they were singing "My Country, 'Tis of Thee."

Tansy got up and brushed off his knees. His weariness was gone, like a heavy coat he might have taken off and left there in the shed. In its place there was a sense of security and well-being, such as comes after a bath at the end of a sweaty day. He slipped back to his room and put on his blacks, and, coming down the front way, he said he thought he would go to the sociable. There was no turning him.

Actually he didn't go in, but waited on the steps. There was something about his feelings that would no more have mixed with the romping and the din than oil will mix with water. Yet it was marvelous just to sit apart and listen to it, especially when the organ struck into some familiar air, and all sang, soprano and alto, tenor and bass. It was marvelous to be whiter than snow, one with God, a little child.

He saw Elsie home, after all. It was only a couple

of hundred yards, down the shore street and up London Lane, but he would never forget it. It was the first time he'd known that love and reverence could be one and the same thing. Earthly love and religious reverence.

Elsie was so pretty, so enchanting in ribbons and laces, so pure, as pure as a flower on which God's sun shines and God's rain falls unfailingly, as if He were saying in the sun and rain: "Of such is the portion of them that think none but healthy thoughts and dream none but wholesome dreams; yea, even to the third and the fourth generation."

Elsie's great-grandfather it was who gave the land for the Atheneum. Her grandfather rescued the missionaries in Paul Straits, and founded the "Light in Darkness." Her father and mother were in the forefront of everything for decency and right living, and they were well-to-do.

The forefathers of that girl on the Stone Fold—what could they have been? By what steps of wrong thinking, of evil impulses given way to and higher impulses denied, must that strain have come down?

But now, because something had been changed in him, Tansy could think of her with nothing but pity.

In London Lane the lights, shining up under the willows, made it seem the nave of some dim cathedral, in which a boy and a girl walked together. And then Elsie was up on her stoop and he stood at the foot of the steps.

"W-e-l-l?" she said. The light from the two long panes flanking the door fell softly on either side of her figure.

"Elsie," he said, "excepting for my father and mother there's nobody in the world but you amounts to *that,* with me."

"What *are* you saying, you silly?"

She came back down the steps to read the silly's eyes.

She was so good she didn't guess the risk. He could have grabbed her and kissed her.

But not he; not now! He kept his hands before him.

"Elsie, you wait and see. Some day I shall be the biggest man in this town." It wasn't like boasting. "For your sake," he might have said.

He marveled as he walked homeward. On one side there were loveliness, niceness, world's goods; on the other unloveliness, a hard living, the scorn of friends. Yet did God ask him to choose the stony way? By a miracle, no. God asked him to choose the way it would have been the part of even the worldly-wise to choose.

Marveling so, as he crossed above the White Boys' place he spied a pin-prick of light away out beyond the Point. It was as though it rested on the low neck of sand, a fallen star.

"Tonight?" He felt angry. "She's got her cheek, I must say!"

On impulse he went down to his father's wharf, cast off the skiff's painter, and got in. He would finish *that* off. He would tell Donna what was what. Straight from the shoulder! Then, before he had got the oars out, he realized that it was only the devil tempting him, weaving any arguments at all, just to get him out there to the Stone Fold again.

He made the boat fast and went home. His parents were still up. He shook his father's hand and kissed his mother on the brow. She eyed him with a knowing little smile. "Been seeing Elsie Baker home?"

Tansy stood with his jaw out.

"I've made a decision tonight," he said. "Some day I shall be the biggest man in this town."

He married Elsie Baker on the day he was made assistant cashier at the bank. Within three months he was cashier.

People trusted him. "No need to count your money

when it's Tansy passes it out of the till." His word was as good as his bond; better, for bonds can be lost or burned or stolen.

Old man Baker bought the Dow residence in the Brick Walk, had it renovated, and gave it to the couple as a wedding-present. Nothing could have been fitter. It was the smallest of the big houses built at the height of the California days, brick for walls, slate for roofing, and a wrought-iron grille around the turf-plot. Four-square with the street, a house of strength and dignity. It was not too large, and that was fit, too. In the great-grandfather's family there were eleven children; in the grandfather's, fourteen; in the father's, three. Elsie herself had none.

It was a town house, pure and simple; the Dows had always been shore folks, lawyers and doctors and the like. From the windows of the guest-chamber up-stairs, full of leafy boughs and neighboring gables, you might have been a thousand miles from the nearest salt; the sewing-room was the same, and so was the west chamber, that had always been known as "the children's room." Yet it is a hard thing to find a house in Urkey without some peep of the water; even at Gramma Pilot's, about as thoroughly shut in as any in town, you've but to climb to the garret to get a sight of blue under the rod of the drug-store chimney. We may wear Brockton shoes, but we're a web-footed race for all that.

And so it was from the "used chamber" in the new Snow home.

The first time they slept there after their wedding-tour to Boston Elsie awoke in the middle of the night. For a moment she couldn't say why. It was too queer. She didn't stir; simply lay there trying to think what it was could be wrong. It wasn't for instants that she recollected where she was, that she was married, that her husband was there beside her. She slid a hand over

his pillow to touch his head. There was no head to touch. She was so startled she didn't know what to do or think. She went cold. Then, of course, when she began to paw around, her hand found Tansy's back. He was sitting up in bed; that was all.

"What *is* the *matter?*" she demanded, she was so upset.

"Nothing. Why, nothing at all." And he lay back on the pillow.

But by and by, when he thought her asleep, he was up again, on an elbow, looking at the window, over the foot of the bed. Like burglars.

You know the feeling of that. Up went Elsie without a word, staring at that window too. And there was nothing there. Nothing but the rear corner of Center Church, one side, and the corner of the Nickerson house, the other, and their one outlook on the harbor in the slit between. By day there would have been a bit of the harbor, a segment of the Point, and out to sea. Now there was nothing but the spark of a chance light; it might have been at the masthead of some vessel at anchor; it was too low for a star.

She was provoked. "What *are* you *gawping* at?"

"Nothing. Why, nothing in the world. What makes you think I ——"

"Is it that light?"

"Wha-what light?"

"Well, I'm all a-fidget now."

He lay back and comforted her. They were young.

Next morning, at the chamber-work, Elsie made a discovery.

"You remember that light last night, Tansy?" she laughed at supper-time. "Well, 'twas nothing but old Cabe Sal'sbury's light in his house over to the Stone Fold; you can see how it ranges in daylight. Must be some one sick.

"Or else Cabe's a great student," she modified it when, at bedtime, she saw the lamp burning again in the window on the Stone Fold.

"What you say to closing those blinds?" Tansy suggested. "I vow there's a tang in the air tonight."

No, Elsie wouldn't listen to that.

"The best doctors nowadays say all the air you can have in your bedroom is none too much, even in Wintertime. I'd suffocate."

It was the following day that Tansy began to seem restless. To begin with, he didn't see where they were going to expect much company, overnight, all their friends being local people, with houses of their own. So why didn't they shift into the front chamber, which was roomier, with two closets; and as for air, certainly there was as much air coming up the Brick Walk as there was in the church back yard.

"My *spare* chamber?" was all Elsie could gasp.

"Or even the west chamber ——"

"The *children's* room?"

Elsie went straight to her mother about it. Her mother smiled. Phidela Baker had been a young woman once, with a new young husband and a new house of her own. "They're all the same; Providence made 'em so. Ever notice a dog that's made up his mind to lie down in a certain spot? Made up or no, he's got to wander and fidget a dozen times around it first, before he settles down. Don't you take on.

"But over and above everything," was the parting advice, "don't you start out by humoring him too much. Be cheery, but put your foot down."

So when Elsie found Tansy at work one of those days, surreptitiously, trying to get the bureau switched for the bed, and the carpet in a tangle with it, she put her foot down.

He looked foolish to be caught so. His face got redder and redder.

"Light shines in my eyes. That is—in the mornings."

"Can you *imagine* how this room would *look?*" She demolished him, ruthlessly, but all the while with a smile.

That smile of Elsie Snow's grew famous. No matter if this went bad and that worse, Tansy Snow's wife always had a smile, always seemed to be saying, like her mother before her: "Don't you take on; God will provide."

Her energy was amazing and fruitful. Once she was married and settled down, and since she had no children to stop her, she was able to be a power for good. She was a treasure for Tansy; she saved his pennies; where another in her place might have got trained help from the mainland she did with young girls to come in, carried the bulk of the house herself, and never looked the worse for it.

As she matured she rounded out amazingly; folks wouldn't have believed it, from the slip of a girl she had been. But no matter how full her hands were, they were never too full to spare a finger where help was needed. In the church, in the Dorcases, in the "Light in Darkness," in the Town Farm Association, at Easter, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, the word came to be: "See Elsie Snow. She'll manage."

There were plenty to say that her capacity for managing didn't go for nothing in Tansy's affairs. Certainly, once, when he wouldn't have foreclosed on Mrs. Hemans's store—which was going to be a valuable property as soon as the fish-freezer was built—certainly then it was his wife showed the common sense of the two, asking him plainly: "Which do you figure you owe the most to, Sarah Hemans or the men and women and children that've got their all in your bank?"

Yet too much may have been made of that. Tansy was honest, and honesty goes a long way. When he made a statement across his desk in the bank-block—it mattered not whether it was to the highest or the humblest—that statement held. And yet, again, in another way, where would he have been if it hadn't been for her? People would really have forgotten that he was alive.

Tansy had turned out a silent and unsociable man. He never went to the post-office, his mail came to the bank. From there home he took the back way; that was about the only place, except church, you'd ever see him, and then half the time he wouldn't see you, walking as he did with his eyes on the ground, studying.

A silent man is a wise one: that's common knowledge. Tansy ought to have been Selectman. Yet he never was. It hurt Elsie. Fall after Fall, as town meeting came and passed, and somehow or other Tansy's name wasn't mentioned, it got deeper and deeper under her skin. Of course nobody ever knew. It wasn't anything you could say anything about. But it was bitter when she recollected the young Tansy standing at the bottom of the steps and vowing: "Some day I shall be the biggest man in this town."

She never mentioned it directly to her husband. The nearest she came was when she would plague him: "Why *don't* you see more of folks? I declare, I can't make you out. What good does it do going to church if you don't take a hand in any of the activities? or in town affairs? See here now, So-and-so and So-and-so are coming in after supper about the cake-sale, and I want you to put on your blacks and stay down a while—and talk. 'Twouldn't harm you to crack a joke, even. Be cheery!"

Tansy would change his collar and put on his blacks. He never crossed his wife; never put *his* foot down. Never but once. That was when Elsie, perceiving at last that there was to be no one for the "children's room," and

moved by something too vague to say, suggested they might be more comfortable in the west chamber, after all, as he himself had said. It was the first time she had ever heard him speak as he did. "We'll stay where we are." And they had stayed.

So he would freshen up after supper and come down as she bade him and sit, absent of eye and mind, in a corner of the cake-sale conference. Ten minutes. Half an hour. Then presently, as things warmed up, like dew under the heightening sun, he would be found to be not there. "Studying," his wife would have to tell them with a sigh. "What can a body do with a man whose work is never done? Up there in the dark, from now to bedtime, like as not, studying, studying. You'd never guess. But I declare if some folks were to work the amount Tansy Snow does, and take on so blessed little about it —— Well, well. And now, who's it arranged shall get the paper for the streamers and festoons?"

So Tansy would sit there, studying. All alone in the "used chamber," in the dark, in his shirt-sleeves, in the rocker. Studying, studying.

First, in the early days, he thought it was a sin. It seemed to him that it must be Satan himself who was putting that lamp in Donna's garret on the Stone Fold, night after night, to mock him, around the very corner of the church of God, and beckon him from the very pillow where he lay beside his wife.

At first he was angry. "The cheek of her!" She knew he was married, must know it; she had been in town with her father many times; he had seen their boat. Yes, he had seen *her*—at a distance. Angry and scared. Anything to escape that ray that poisoned his thoughts, his dreams! Any room, any window, but that! Angry, scared, and *fascinated!* That was the worst. Fascinated, so that it ate a hole in the fabric of his honesty, like a

moth-hole, tiny enough to escape notice, but big enough to let a lie through.

"I've to step up-stairs and get my slippers, wife dear."

"You're tired, Tansy; let me go."

"No, no, you stay by the fire and read; I'll be but a moment, dear."

For a while he was ashamed of himself. He ran to the stairs and started down if he heard Elsie coming. He felt he ought to make it up to her somehow, pet her, show himself ten times more fervent than it was in his nature to be. But that couldn't last. Nothing that's not in a man's nature can last. What *is* in his nature will out.

It's in the nature of islanders to be weather-vanes. As the weather goes, so do our spirits. There's none that hasn't, in some one of his generations, had a ship. So, even though her husband was a confirmed shore body, Elsie never thought it anything out of the way that he should be weather-tender, and show it by fidgeting and prowling on nights when the fog came and the wind was in the east.

Through the Spring and Summer of their first year there was prevailing fair weather, and only rarely a night like that—a blessed one (at first) when the star on the Stone Fold was blotted out—a torment (later on) when Tansy was upstairs as much as down, stealing peeps, dreading, hoping. In September, though, there came a real spell, five days of it as thick as a hat. In the night of the fourth a lobsterman named Antony Coral claimed to have seen Mr. Snow of the bank in a dory in Chalk Ground Slough, toward the Stone Fold—was near to running into him—fact!

If a tale like that had been let go far it might have harmed a man in Snow's position. But it didn't go far. Before his mates at the dock had got through guying the credulous "Portuguee," he began to wonder if he hadn't

been asleep at his oars, after all, and dreaming dreams, and he never brought it up again.

One thing about that night is certain, however: Tansy wasn't at home. Another thing is certain: it was he that was rowing the dory in Chalk Ground Slough, toward the Stone Fold. And it wasn't about five minutes after he had avoided collision with Coral's lobster-boat that, close aboard the island beach, he made out finally a disk of warm light the size of a penny, up in that part of the vapors where Donna's garret window ought to be.

That settled it. That made it another thing. Had it been no more than spite, Donna wouldn't have wasted oil and wick in weather that would smother the spark in twenty rods, and never a chance in God's world for Tansy to see and suffer. It was something in *her* made her do it, then; like an act in some ritual of witchery. Turning the boat around, he rowed for home. What he had found out filled him with a sense of pity. No, not pity. There was solemnity, tragedy in it, but it wasn't pity, nor sorrow.

After that he began to lose his feeling of shame when he made excuses to slip away up-stairs, till he made them no more. He no longer stole peeps from the window; he sat there brazenly, "studying." As time went by, if the good people gathered in Elsie's parlor—if they could have seen him at the moment of his escape up-stairs—they would never have known him for Tansy Snow. His face was contorted. He shook his fist. "Damn the lot of you, you gabbling, gossiping little parcel of busybodies, you and your holy little schemes, your little brains! The devil! What claim have you on *me?*"

But when he had reached the bedroom and found the rocker and sat down with his back to the bedpost and his sock-feet on the window-sill, little by little the lines would vanish from his face. Little by little as he watched the fallen star, or thought of it shining in secret

there, he forgot to hear the busy voices below; he heard the wind running in gray grasses and the living sound of breakers on far-strewn reefs and the dry rustle of leaves in a thorn-tree. And what had happened was that he was no longer surrounded by walls and gables and hemmed in by the thoughts and needs and elbows of hundreds of industrious little two-legged vegetables; the walls had melted, his horizon was the horizon of dark ocean, and he walked in space.

And a girl walked with him—no, a woman—no (as time passed), more than a woman, a kind of goddess, sea-begot, earth-born, the soil of the mother still carelessly on her, and she the stronger for it, and slow, as the tides are slow, and generous, as the earth is generous with the seeds of life, and brooding calm as the sky is, which, knowing nothing, holds within itself all the generations of them that know all. Her hair was thick and tangled, because the grass grows so; eyes heavy, because they looked at things far off; hands large, because the blood that fed them was warm; and her words, little words, because only little words can stay in the wind, that blows from the caverns among the stars.

"The gray ewe dropped twins in that brush-patch. That's a good ewe."

And Tansy could imagine his own words as simple. "Yes, a good ewe."

"I like the feel of the wind, like tonight; there's rain to come. I like it to blow under my hair, the same as kisses. I love kisses."

"I love to kiss you. I love to be with you with nothing but water roundabout and nothing but stars above, and all on earth asleep, hushed up."

"They're awake in China, though, for the world's round like a ball."

"Most folks know the world's round, yet they think it's flat. I love that in you, Donna; you can *feel* it, you

can *see* it being round like a ball. And you can see the stars being round like balls as big as suns, to shine hot on other worlds where there were sheep and people living and having twins and dead under the grass a million centuries before Adam and Eve—and never a thought in all their races whether it should be a thousand or twelve hundred on the Dee Nickerson house, or something useful like aprons or something tasty like doilies at the Dorcas meeting next Tuesday week. You see it. You feel it."

"Yes, Tansy, I see it. I feel it."

"You and I. I love you. And here we are at the tree."

Nor could he any longer, caught in the net of fantasy, recognize the thing as sin. *There's* revenge for you. To have grown to be a man who didn't know right from wrong. Tansy, whose honesty was his strength!

After all, he wasn't a man; he was two men. It was the other that became president of the bank, director in both the new freezers, and owner of considerable property in the town. No one knew his duplicity. How was it possible? Certainly, after living with him ten years, his wife didn't know. Donna herself, who might have guessed, might have wished, even Donna couldn't *know*. He could assure himself there was no one. So he had forgotten what happened that night in the wagon-shed behind the church (and almost under his window now). He had forgotten God, who never forgets.

But God moves in a mysterious way. It was a mystery to all "what it was bit Tansy" in his thirty-sixth year. There he was one week, a bit stoop-shouldered perhaps, but wiry for all that and going his way. Honest Tansy, who ought to have been Selectman—and why didn't *some*body ever put him up? And there he was the next week, and talk of galloping consumption. Or Bright's disease. Or what?

They couldn't have got it out of him; he was too

close of mouth. Nor, dig and delve as they would, they couldn't get it out of Mrs. Snow. She didn't know; that's why. He sleeps poorly; that's about all she could say. He would toss, his head as restless on the pillows as if it wore a crown of thorns. Once when he thought her asleep he got up and went into the spare chamber. From the hall where she had stolen she saw him with a candle staring at his own face in the bureau glass. The night-puffed face, the thinning hair, the stooped shoulders—in the mirrored eyes there was the look of a soul in hell, self-pity, self-hate, self-mockery.

Elsie was worried in earnest. When, without warning, a day or so later, he announced, "We'll try the west room a spell for a change," she was quick to humor him. Yet it came to nothing. Before she had so much as a bed-sheet shifted, there he was back, bareheaded: "Let it be as 'twas."

Here are the facts. Tansy oughtn't to have gone near the docks. For years he had kept clear of them, by instinct more than by reason. Now the mysterious way God took was to make him careless. It was a bright and innocent morning anyway; insurance was wanted on a big yawl; it's better to see a risk with your own eyes than to go by hearsay. (If you can see the risk.)

Alongside the yawl three single-handers were lying, the men in them sorting their last night's catch; lusty, brawny young fellows, a pleasure to the eye with their deep color and their flashing grins (more pleasure to the eye than a banker in a night-shirt before a looking-glass). And their voices, in the clear of the morning, were gay and strong.

Five years later Tansy could have repeated every syllable of every word:

"Looks o' that catch o' yourn there, Eddie, you didn't set no very likely place last night, did ye?"

"Aw, leave Eddie be, Sam. Didn't ye hear the ter-

rible thing? Got a good fare o' haddock, Eddie did, only he had to heave the best part away. Turn out to be moth-millers when he come to look. Whatcha make o' that?"

"Laugh, you fellows; I like to hear ye. But if ye really want to know who *'twas* fishin' the Stone Fold last night, don't ask me; ask Codhead Collins; he's the boy'll know."

"All right, all right, don't jump so. All reminded me was, I was thinking I noted a new little face on the beach over there when I come by the old girl's last week. And a new batch o' wash on the line."

"Godfrey! How many's that she's got now?"

"Don't ask me; I ain't the only dory in the fleet."

It wasn't consumption; Tansy didn't cough. Nor Bright's disease; it didn't act that way. The doctor said it was just insomnia, and it came from too much work. Human flesh can't stand studying at a desk the livelong day and then in a bedroom rocker half the night. He advised, and Elsie insisted, that Tansy ease up, go off somewhere, and take a holiday.

"No, I'll just see it through," was all Tansy would say.

When he said that morning: "We'll try the west room a spell," it was a confession of rout. Once away from that window he might forget; that's how he figured it. He hadn't yet got it through his head that God never forgets. At the bank, who should be waiting to see him but two of those trawlmen, Eddie and Sam. It was something about a loan; Tansy hardly knew; the business was done mechanically; the whole sudden thing *he* saw was that he wasn't to be let escape; that God had sent those wind-browned lusty young fellows as a sign and reminder that by no hiding of his eyes was he to be let forget. He faced it.

When the emissaries were gone he got down on his elbows on his desk and looked at his conscience, and he

saw that in all those years of letting his imagination run to that island, instead of keeping it home of nights where it belonged, he had been doing a sinful thing. Now for atonement he was given a cross to bear. In the long run, unless he bore it without flinching, the failure would find him out. It was then, forgetting his hat, he ran home to Elsie with his "Let it be as 'twas."

"As 'twas!" The irony! As though it could be any nearer to what it had been than heaven is to hell.

He tried never to flinch. Shirt-sleeves and sock-feet, "as 'twas," he sat there whole evenings through. No longer did he stride across the wind-blown grass with Donna by his side. He ran at a crouch under cover of the brush-patches, peeping, spying. Or he lay hidden as near as he dared to the thorn-tree, holding his breath and listening—to youth.

Almost as bad as the jealousy was the shame. Beginning by boasting he would be the biggest man in town, he had ended by being the least in a shady brotherhood, the scummiest of the scum of the water-front.

Sometimes he had to flinch a little; sometimes, re-evoking the image of the goddess he had created, he would rail at them. And now his *"I was the first!"* was the whine of a whip, and he had to grovel:

"Lord, when I have borne enough, in Thy mercy take it away."

There came a time when it seemed it was to be taken away. Mercy's instrument was Austin Dow, the proprietor of the Seaside Lunch that came with the steamer, along with other changes, when the old packet-schooner gave up. More and more excursionists were coming for the day's sail from Gillyport, with an hour ashore at noon, and Dow got to thinking he'd have a sign put on his roof, a big fellow, one you could read from the harbor coming in, with "Shore Dinners Our Specialty" in letters five feet high. And he wanted a license from the town.

It came up in special meeting in January, and it made a stir. There were forward-looking people who realized that times had changed, and they spoke in favor. There were just as many against it, though not quite so apt at saying why; anyway, it would be an eyesore to the worshipers coming out of Center Church, that monstrosity on a roof across the street. And then a man got up in the back of the hall and asked permission to speak.

The man was Tansy Snow. If it had been George True, the town dummy, folks wouldn't have been struck so dead. And that was only the beginning. From the first the thing that had made it look as though Dow might get the vote was that it was the business men that were with him; it was the sentimental old ladies (male and female) that were against.

And now to hear Banker Snow, the busiest business man of them all, the dried-up human calculator, the man with no sentiment, no romance, no imagination beyond set-down-five-and-carry-two—to see him standing there like a born revivalist—and to hear him carrying on—diving back into history and coming up again—his face running sweat and his eyes as big as quarters with earnestness—reciting the beauty and dignity and grandeur of our island metropolis—recalling the impressions of his boyhood, the simple nobility of that shore-street sky-line, as great epochs had builded it slowly—and then taking the proposed sign-board as a symbol of all the ills the mainland suffers from, making bigness an idol, bustle a religion, the dollar a god to trample them in the dust—it was too much for the town meeting. When it came to a vote, there wasn't a voice for the lunchroom: Dow was too done up even to lift his own.

No one was more amazed than Elsie Snow, or more thrilled. If Tansy didn't fathom what he had done, or what was to follow, she did. As she took him out and home through the streets where people lingered she held

him by the arm, "the biggest man in town"; you couldn't fool Elsie Snow.

When they had undressed and she had blown out the light and gone to lift the window, she stood for a moment dreaming down at Dow's lunchroom on the shore, bright in the moonlight in the bottom of the crevice between the Nickerson house and the corner of the church, and, "By gracious," she mused, "it never till this instant occurred to me, but it would've cut off half our one and only sea-view, that monstrosity of his."

No, there was one more amazed than Elsie.

Staring out through the moonlight, and through the darkness when the moon had set, Tansy Snow was wondering:

"Why in the name of the Eternal did I do that?"

Elsie was right about consequences. The town waked up and rubbed its eyes. Tansy Snow had pulled the wool over them for a couple of decades, but he couldn't do it any more. From the minute he sat down after his speech in meeting there wasn't a question in anybody's mind but what he'd be chosen Selectman the coming Autumn, in place of John Matheson, who was "getting through." If he'd take it, that is.

What a question! As we used to say: "Will a duck swim?" And yet very presently here was Elsie Snow going around with another kind of smile and another and mysterious light in her eye. She was a wonder, Elsie was.

How did she get wind of it? you'll ask. But you must remember that, what with being chairman of this, manager of that, and corresponding secretary of the other, the banker's wife had in her hands the ends of more underground wires than any dozen in Urkey, and under-water wires too, tapping the gossip of all the towns and precincts the length of the Cape. And wise in politics, she knew that two and two, coming at the right

time and at all dramatic, are apt to make nearer forty than four. And she knew that there is a tide in the affairs of men. And she knew that it never rains but it pours.

She could hear them at Gillyport: "Well, they say Honest Tansy Snow opened up his mouth at last, and the man's a spellbinder; vow he is." And at Barnstable: "They knew him, and they knew he meant it; he ain't the kind to spout for spoutin' sake, Banker Snow ain't. And they do say there was a good many noses blowed there toward the end."

But Elsie knew more than that. Piecing it together in her astute mind, from a hint here, an allusion there, a slip of somebody's tongue or pen, she knew a thing that only three men in the Congressional District happened yet to know. And this was that "the party," what with the chill of old blood and the heat of bad blood, was secretly in a bad way indeed; that it wanted a doctor, and wanted one quickly—with the Autumn elections coming forward, and a member of Congress to be sent to Washington. No veteran; no silver-trumpeting old war-horse. No, a new name, a fresh fame, a clean slate.

"And where, oh, where," thought Elsie, "where will the lightning strike?"

Selectman? Selectman of a village? That was why she smiled. Since Barlow Atkins left Congress in 1884 people in Urkey had almost forgotten that an islander *could* sit under the dome in Washington. "The biggest man in this town." She remembered the young Tansy standing up straight in London Lane. Well, she'd see.

One afternoon in mid-July the Knights came over in the steamer *Senator Bates* for their annual "time," a clambake at Blue Goat Cove in the evening and the sail back home by moonlight later on. When they had marched the length of the shore street behind their band and got a start for the cove, they took half the popula-

tion with them, but they left three of their own number behind.

The sail was all right for these three, but they weren't much on clambakes. They'd rather loaf around the old town, looking at the houses. Perhaps they were interested in architecture. Or perhaps it was lightning-rods. They were Mr. Claude Byram of Gillyport, Captain Charlie Slocum of Barnstable, and ex-Senator Bates himself, and they were the three men in the district who knew what Elsie knew. As they strolled they talked. They talked about Henry Poor, the young lawyer in Provincetown, who, unheard of a year ago, had just won the Province-lands suit for the Commonwealth. They talked of the new man who was making such a name for himself as head of the Highmarket Academy—a scholar —no taint of politics there. And once or twice, lingering near the end of the Brick Walk, "Well, here's where *he* lives," they temporized. "What do we say?"

But they couldn't seem quite to say. They had to talk it all over again. Six o'clock passed. They had a snack at Dow's place, and then it was seven, and then it was eight. Elsie Snow wasn't the woman to wait forever. It was in the drug-store, where they had stopped for cigars, that she brought them to earth.

"Captain Slocum, as I live! And *Mr.* Byram! And —*not* Senator *Bates!* Well, I declare, who'd have thought to find *you* drifting around our little town, and without a soul to manage for you? I give you my word ——"

She gave them her word it was an outrage, and that even if there wasn't a committee of welcome, there was a home that would be honored by their presence, and a fresh lemon layer-cake, and a drop of rhubarb wine, put down the year she and Tansy were married. And Tansy *would* be tickled.

It seemed providential; seemed to help to clear their minds. When they had arrived, most easily, most pleas-

antly, at the foot of the Snow steps, they slackened pace and let their hostess go on in ahead.

She made it simple for them. "I'll run on and see Tansy's fit to be looked at; he's that much of a home body, he's probably in slippers now."

"I guess, Mrs. Snow," the Senator called after her, spokesman for the three, "I guess you can tell Snow *we'll* be tickled to see *him.*"

All the woman could think, and that over and over, was, "This is the greatest day in Urkey's history."

Tansy, hearing voices, was half-way up-stairs. She bustled him up the other half, the news on her tongue; but then it was too enormous to tell.

"Get into your blacks, and *hurry,*" she bade him; "there's company."

As she turned and swept down-stairs again to put the company at its ease with ash-trays and cake and rhubarb wine, the chosen of fortune felt along the wall with a sigh. Why wouldn't people let him be?

Once inside, he started toward the window, of habit a quarter-century old. Then he remembered he was to hurry. Company. Who? Why had there been that note in her voice? Perhaps at last it was somebody about the Autumn meeting and the Selectmanship. Oh, Tansy knew. He never let on, but he wasn't a fool. And he wanted it—as he'd never wanted anything. Why? For the name? Yes, in a way. More than anything in life, he wanted to be able to go to that window and throw back the taunt of that leering eye of light.

"Yah. Take a look at me—the man that's trusted above all others! Selectman! The biggest man in this island and this town! You, and your 'moth-millers,' your dirty, filthy nobodies, look at me! Yah!"

But he had been told to hurry. In that funny way—*hurry!* It *was* the Selectmanship! As good as done already. Because he had been an upright citizen and

an honest man. Here he was at the window, after all.

It wasn't a "Yah!" It wasn't a sound, nothing formed, just a formless outlashing of a life that was tired in secret; secretly, prematurely old. Then, as he looked again, he lifted a hand and drew it across his eyes.

"Fog coming in. Won't have much of a moonlight sail, that crowd."

He removed his hand and stared. There was no fog. The sky was as clear as glass and full of stars. He put his other hand on the bedpost. The bedpost was solid, anyway.

"Good God! What's—wh-what's happened? What's wrong?"

Elsie couldn't keep them occupied forever, even with cake and rhubarb wine. Minutes are minutes to such men. When fifteen had passed, and Slocum had looked at his watch twice, she went to the stairs and called. Then, laughing, "What would you do with such a man?" she marched up to find him. The bedroom was dark, and he wasn't there. She went to the spare chamber, to the west chamber, down the back way to the kitchen. She returned to their bedroom; he *must* be there.

She felt on the bed, the chair; she stood staring out of the window.

She shut her eyes and opened them again. A curious uneasiness, having nothing to do with the company downstairs, seemed to lay hold of her.

"Fog," she said to herself.

She turned around. What was the matter with this room tonight? Why was everything so—so—so wrong —so lost—so funny? She touched the bedpost. It was solid enough. She glanced toward the window again.

She laughed. She saw what was wrong, and it was ridiculous. For two dozen years, without knowing it, she had depended on seeing a light there when the weather was clear. When it was thick, there was no light; no

light, it must be thick. And here it was clear, and no light. Absurd, but it had given her the jumps.

That shows what habit is.

Rid of the spell, she remembered what she was about. Her lips whiter and whiter with anger, running on frantic tiptoe, she searched the house.

Coming through the parlor she was all cheer. "Tansy'll be down directly," she promised them, and, slipping out of the door, she was gone.

Time passed. Once or twice they heard a voice calling. "Tansy! Tansy!" off in the distance, among the houses and lanes.

They got to talking. "You can't tell me this fellow Poor hasn't made a big impression, especially down-Cape." "Yes, but he's a lawyer, and that means politician to lots of people. Now this man McDowell over at the Academy ——"

When Mrs. Snow reappeared it was awkward. They didn't want to seem to run, but there was a man Byram ought to see, and there was the boat.

They got out backward, Slocum saying, "We're right sorry not to have seen Snow," and the old Senator adding a word of kindness: "The talk's been up our way that your husband's slated for the next Selectman over here. I'm glad of that; he ought to make a good one, from all I hear."

Elsie stood staring at the closed door when they were gone.

"Selectman!" she whispered. *"Selectman!"*

All the poison of all the years came pouring out: "I'll *see* him Selectman! I'd kill myself first! He shall stay a stick till the day of his death, he shall. A dumb, stupid stick—stick-in-the-mud. *Ohhhh!"*

In the kitchen of the house on the Stone Fold they were playing parchesi down on the floor. The board was an old one, held together with court-plaster; most of the

men were buttons, and there were only two dice left. Despite these defects, however; despite the two youngest, two babies, creeping in continually and grabbing and getting slapped; and despite the paralytic old shepherd in the chair behind the towel-rack, who wanted attending to now and then—despite these handicaps they played with a quiet concentration, watching each the moves of all the others, alert for cheating, a gamin shrewdness in the eyes narrowed under the forelocks of tangled hair. It was an old game with them; yet tonight there was something new about it; as new as though it had been another game altogether, or the same game transported to heaven, where all is light.

"Bettern'n that old lantern!"

"Better'n two lanterns!"

"Better'n *ten* lanterns!"

So from time to time, between moves, carried away afresh by realization, they joined and gloated.

"Better'n a *hundred* lanterns!"

The dogs were barking outside. An old one from under the stove sniffed toward the door, bristling. The players paid no attention, but the grandfather began to screech at the top of his lungs: "Sha'n't have it! Sha'n't! Ain't nobody no decency? With *her* there? Etta, you tell 'em go way. It's an unholy sin—comin' round a night like tonight—that's what it is! Etta!"

"Shut your face!" Etta threw at him, as, without haste, she got up from the floor. She was a woman of twenty-odd, the mother of one of the infants underfoot. "Remember, you, it's my next move!" she threatened the others; then again to the old man: "Won't you shut up, f'gracious sake!" and finally to the door: "Well, well, 'tain't locked, is it? *Come in!*"

The door opened. Those on the floor sat up straight. Etta retreated a step, taken aback to see a stranger.

"What d'y' want?" she muttered.

The man kept standing there, staring at her; staring at her squat, strong-muscled figure, her lowering face, her hair, thick and matted about her head, the color of unwashed brown sheep. She didn't like it.

"Who are ye, and what d'y' want? Y' dumb?"

But the old shepherd began to screech now: "*I* know 'im! I seen 'im many's the time over to the village. I see ye, Mr. Snow. I know ye well, Banker Snow. Well, I vow! Draw out a chair for Mr. Snow, Etta. Florry! Frank! Scabby! What a parcel o' dummies! Git a chair for Banker Snow."

"What d'y' want?" Etta persisted, unmoved.

Snow lifted a hand and passed it down over his face, which looked drawn and moist. Like a man talking in his sleep, he asked: "What's wrong with Donna?"

That seemed to loosen all tongues at once. The kitchen was as full of voices, of a sudden, as it was of the yellow glare.

"Donna's dead."

"Donna's in there; wanta see 'er?"

"Ma went sick and she got worse and died off."

"Donna ain't boss no longer, she ain't."

"We got the lamp down."

"We gone and got the lamp on 'er now, for *all* 'er."

"At last we got the lamp."

Snow seemed to see the lamp for the first time. Like a man walking in his sleep he went to look at it. It was worth looking at. It stood on its own stand, a good four feet high; its finely swelled reservoir had variegated chasings of brass and nickel all over it; it had an extra-size chimney without a nick, and two wicks, one within the other. A lamp for any parlor in the world. All the parts that could be rubbed were as bright as a new one in the store. It had been looked after, like new; the price-tag, even, had never been taken off. It hung from

the stem of the regulator, and the mark was still legible on it amongst the spotting of flies. Tansy read it.

"$6."

Some folks have a God of mercy. And some have a terrible God.

QUALITY [1]

JOHN GALSWORTHY

I knew him from the days of my extreme youth, because he made my father's boots; inhabiting with his elder brother two little shops let into one, in a small by-street—now no more, but then most fashionably placed in the West End.

That tenement had a certain quiet distinction; there was no sign upon its face that he made for any of the Royal Family—merely his own German name of Gessler Brothers; and in the window a few pairs of boots. I remember that it always troubled me to account for those unvarying boots in the window, for he made only what was ordered, reaching nothing down, and it seemed so inconceivable that what he made could ever have failed to fit. Had he bought them to put there? That, too, seemed inconceivable. He would never have tolerated in his house leather on which he had not worked himself. Besides, they were too beautiful—the pair of pumps, so inexpressibly slim, the patent leathers with cloth tops, making water come into one's mouth, the tall brown riding boots with marvellous sooty glow, as if, though new, they had been worn a hundred years. Those pairs could only have been made by one who saw before him the Soul of Boot—so truly were they prototypes incarnating the very spirit of all foot-gear. These thoughts, of course, came to me later, though even when I was promoted to him, at the age of perhaps fourteen, some inkling haunted me of the dignity of himself and brother. For

[1] From *The Inn of Tranquility;* copyright, 1912, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

to make boots—such boots as he made—seemed to me then, and still seems to me, mysterious and wonderful.

I remember well my shy remark, one day, while stretching out to him my youthful foot:

"Isn't it awfully hard to do, Mr. Gessler?"

And his answer, given with a sudden smile from out of the sardonic redness of his beard: "Id is an Ardt!"

Himself, he was a little as if made from leather, with his yellow crinkly face, and crinkly reddish hair and beard, and neat folds slanting down his cheeks to the corners of his mouth, and his guttural and one-toned voice; for leather is a sardonic substance, and stiff and slow of purpose. And that was the character of his face, save that his eyes, which were grey-blue, had in them the simple gravity of one secretly possessed by the Ideal. His elder brother was so very like him—though watery, paler in every way, with a great industry—that sometimes in early days I was not quite sure of him until the interview was over. Then I knew that it was he, if the words, "I will ask my brudder," had not been spoken; and that if, they had, it was his elder brother.

When one grew old and wild and ran up bills, one somehow never ran them up with Gessler Brothers. It would not have seemed becoming to go in there and stretch out one's foot to that blue iron-spectacled glance, owing him for more than—say—two pairs, just the comfortable reassurance that one was still his client.

For it was not possible to go to him very often—his boots lasted terribly, having something beyond the temporary—some, as it were, essence of boot stitched into them.

One went in, not as into most shops, in the mood of: "Please serve me, and let me go!" but restfully, as one enters a church; and, sitting on the single wooden chair, waited—for there was never anybody there. Soon, over the top edge of that sort of well—rather dark, and

smelling soothingly of leather—which formed the shop, there would be seen his face, or that of his elder brother, peering down. A guttural sound, and the tip-tap of bast slippers beating the narrow wooden stairs, and he would stand before one without coat, a little bent, in leather apron, with sleeves turned back, blinking—as if awakened from some dream of boots, or like an owl surprised in daylight and annoyed at this interruption.

And I would say: "How do you do, Mr. Gessler? Could you make me a pair of Russia leather boots?"

Without a word he would leave me, retiring whence he came, or into the other portion of the shop, and I would continue to rest in the wooden chair, inhaling the incense of his trade. Soon he would come back, holding in his thin, veined hand a piece of gold-brown leather. With eyes fixed on it, he would remark: "What a beautiful biece!" When I, too, had admired it, he would speak again. "When do you wand dem?" And I would answer: "Oh! As soon as you conveniently can." And he would say: "To-morrow fordnighd?" Or if he were his elder brother: "I will ask my brudder!"

Then I would murmur: "Thank you! Good-morning, Mr. Gessler." "Goot-morning!" he would reply, still looking at the leather in his hand. And as I moved to the door, I would hear the tip-tap of his bast slippers restoring him, up the stairs, to his dream of boots. But if it were some new kind of foot-gear that he had not yet made me, then indeed he would observe ceremony —divesting me of my boot and holding it long in his hand, looking at it with eyes at once critical and loving, as if recalling the glow with which he had created it, and rebuking the way in which one had disorganized this masterpiece. Then, placing my foot on a piece of paper, he would two or three times tickle the outer edges with a pencil and pass his nervous fingers over my toes, feeling himself into the heart of my requirements.

I cannot forget that day on which I had occasion to say to him: "Mr. Gessler, that last pair of town walking-boots creaked, you know."

He looked at me for a time without replying, as if expecting me to withdraw or qualify the statement, then said:

"Id shouldn'd 'ave greaked."

"It did, I'm afraid."

"You goddem wed before dey found demselves?"

"I don't think so."

At that he lowered his eyes, as if hunting for memory of those boots, and I felt sorry I had mentioned this grave thing.

"Zend dem back!" he said; "I will look at dem."

A feeling of compassion for my creaking boots surged up in me, so well could I imagine the sorrowful long curiosity of regard which he would bend on them.

"Zome boods," he said slowly, "are bad from birdt. If I can do noding wid dem, I dake dem off your bill."

Once (once only) I went absent-mindedly into his shop in a pair of boots bought in an emergency at some large firm's. He took my order without showing me any leather, and I could feel his eyes penetrating the inferior integument of my foot. At last he said:

"Dose are nod my boods."

The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, not even of contempt, but there was in it something quiet that froze the blood. He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot, endeavouring to be fashionable, was not quite comfortable.

"Id 'urds you dere," he said. "Dose big virms 'ave no self-respect. Drash!" And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. It was the only time I ever heard him discuss the conditions and hardships of his trade.

"Dey get id all," he said, "dey get id by adverdisement,

nod by work. Dey dake it away from us, who lofe our boods. Id gomes to this—bresently I haf no work. Every year id gets less—you will see." And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle—and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!

As best I could, I explained the circumstances of the purchase of those ill-omened boots. But his face and voice made so deep impression that during the next few minutes I ordered many pairs. Nemesis fell! They lasted more terribly than ever. And I was not able conscientiously to go to him for nearly two years.

When at last I went I was surprised to find that outside one of the two little windows of his shop another name was painted, also that of a bootmaker—making, of course, for the Royal Family. The old familiar boots, no longer in dignified isolation, were huddled in the single window. Inside, the now contracted well of the one little shop was more scented and darker than ever. And it was longer than usual, too, before a face peered down, and the tip-tap of the bast slippers began. At last he stood before me, and, gazing through those rusty iron spectacles, said:

"Mr. ——, isn'd it?"

"Ah! Mr. Gessler," I stammered, "but your boots are really *too* good, you know! See, these are quite decent still!" And I stretched out to him my foot. He looked at it.

"Yes," he said, "beople do nod wand good boods, id seems."

To get away from his reproachful eyes and voice I hastily remarked: "What have you done to your shop?"

He answered quietly: "Id was too exbensif. Do you wand some boods?"

I ordered three pairs, though I had only wanted two, and quickly left. I had, I do not know quite what feel-

ing of being part, in his mind, of a conspiracy against him; or not perhaps so much against him as against his idea of boot. One does not, I suppose, care to feel like that; for it was again many months before my next visit to his shop, paid, I remember, with the feeling: "Oh! well, I can't leave the old boy—so here goes! Perhaps it'll be his elder brother!"

For his elder brother, I knew, had not character enough to reproach me, even dumbly.

And, to my relief, in the shop there did appear to be his elder brother, handling a piece of leather.

"Well, Mr. Gessler," I said, "how are you?"

He came close, and peered at me.

"I am breddy well," he said slowly, "but my elder brudder is dead."

And I saw that it was indeed himself—but how aged and wan! And never before had I heard him mention his brother. Much shocked, I murmured: "Oh! I am sorry!"

"Yes," he answered, "he was a good man, he made a good bood; but he is dead." And he touched the top of his head, where the hair had suddenly gone as thin as it had been on that of his poor brother, to indicate, I suppose, the cause of death. "He could nod ged over losing the oder shop. Do you wand any boods?" And he held up the leather in his hand: "Id's a beaudiful biece."

I ordered several pairs. It was very long before they came—but they were better than ever. One simply could not wear them out. And soon after that I went abroad.

It was over a year before I was again in London. And the first shop I went to was my old friend's. I had left a man of sixty, I came back to one of seventy-five, pinched and worn and tremulous, who genuinely, this time, did not at first know me.

"Oh! Mr. Gessler," I said, sick at heart; "how splen-

did your boots are! See, I've been wearing this pair nearly all the time I've been abroad; and they're not half worn out, are they?"

He looked long at my boots—a pair of Russia leather, and his face seemed to regain steadiness. Putting his hand on my instep, he said:

"Do dey vid you here? I 'ad drouble wid dat bair, I remember."

I assured him that they had fitted beautifully.

"Do you wand any boods?" he said. "I can make dem quickly; id is a slack dime."

I answered: "Please, please! I want boots all round —every kind!"

"I will make a vresh model. Your food must be bigger." And with utter slowness, he traced round my foot, and felt my toes, only once looking up to say:

"Did I dell you my brudder was dead?"

To watch him was painful, so feeble had he grown; I was glad to get away.

I had given those boots up, when one evening they came. Opening the parcel, I set the four pairs out in a row. Then one by one I tried them on. There was no doubt about it. In shape and fit, in finish and quality of leather, they were the best he had ever made me. And in the mouth of one of the Town walking-boots I found his bill. The amount was the same as usual, but it gave me quite a shock. He had never before sent it in till quarter day. I flew down-stairs, and wrote a cheque, and posted it at once with my own hand.

A week later, passing the little street, I thought I would go in and tell him how splendidly the new boots fitted. But when I came to where his shop had been, his name was gone. Still there, in the window, were the slim pumps, the patent leathers with cloth tops, the sooty riding boots.

I went in, very much disturbed. In the two little

shops—again made into one—was a young man with an English face.

"Mr. Gessler in?" I said.

He gave me a strange, ingratiating look.

"No, sir," he said, "no. But we can attend to anything with pleasure. We've taken the shop over. You've seen our name, no doubt, next door. We make for some very good people."

"Yes, yes," I said; "but Mr. Gessler?"

"Oh!" he answered; "dead."

"Dead! But I only received these boots from him last Wednesday week."

"Ah!" he said; "a shockin' go. Poor old man starved 'imself."

"Good God!"

"Slow starvation, the doctor called it! You see he went to work in such a way! Would keep the shop on; wouldn't have a soul touch his boots except himself. When he got an order, it took him such a time. People won't wait. He lost everybody. And there he'd sit, goin' on and on—I will say that for him—not a man in London made a better boot! But look at the competition! He never advertised! Would 'ave the best leather, too, and do it all 'imself. Well, there it is. What could you expect with his ideas?"

"But starvation ——!"

"That may be a bit flowery, as the sayin' is—but I know myself he was sittin' over his boots day and night, to the very last. You see I used to watch him. Never gave 'imself time to eat; never had a penny in the house. All went in rent and leather. How he lived so long I don't know. He regular let his fire go out. He was a character. But he made good boots."

"Yes," I said, "he made good boots."

And I turned and went out quickly, for I did not want that youth to know that I could hardly see.

THE FATHER[1]

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

The man of whom this story tells was the richest in the parish. His name was Thord Overas. He stood one day in the pastor's study, tall and serious. "I have gotten a son," he said, "and wish to have him baptized."

"What is to be his name?"

"Finn, in honor of my father."

"And the sponsors?"

They were named, and proved to be the best men and women of Thord's kin in the district.

"Is there anything else?" asked the pastor, looking up.

Thord hesitated a moment. "I should like to have my son baptized alone," he said.

"That is to say on a week-day?"

"On Saturday next, at twelve o'clock, noon."

"Is there anything else?" asked the pastor.

"There is nothing else," answered Thord, taking his cap to go.

"Just one word," said the pastor, as he arose, stepped over to Thord, took him by the hand, and looked him in the eyes; "God grant that this child may be a blessing to you."

Sixteen years later Thord again stood in the pastor's study.

"You are holding your own well, Thord," said the pastor, seeing no change in him.

"I have no sorrows," answered Thord.

[1] Printed with the permission of the translator, Professor Julius E. Olson, University of Wisconsin.

To this the pastor made no response. But a moment later he asked: "What is your errand this evening?"

"This evening I come concerning my son, who is to be confirmed to-morrow."

"He is a clever lad."

"I did not care to pay the parson's fee until I heard what rank the boy is to have in the class to-morrow."

"He is to be at the head."

"So I understand, and here are ten dollars for the pastor."

"Is there anything else?" asked the pastor, looking at Thord.

"There is nothing else."

And Thord departed.

Eight years had passed, when one day a bustling was heard at the pastor's study door; a number of men appeared, headed by Thord. The pastor looked up and recognized him. "You are out in full force this evening, Thord."

"I have come to ask the banns for my son. He is to be married to Karen Storliden, the daughter of Gudmund, who is here with me."

"Why, she is the richest girl in the district."

"So they say," answered Thord, thrusting his hand through his hair.

The pastor sat a moment as in meditation. Without a word he entered the names in his books, and the men signed theirs. Thord laid three dollars upon the table.

"The fee is only one," said the pastor.

"Yes, I know; but he is my only child, and I wish to be generous."

The pastor accepted the money. "This is the third time, Thord, that you have been here in behalf of your son."

"Yes, and now I am done with him," said Thord; he

closed his pocketbook, said good-by, and walked out, slowly followed by the others.

Two weeks after that day father and son were rowing across the calm surface of the lake to the Storliden farm to arrange for the wedding.

"That seat does not seem to be right," said the son, and arose to adjust it. But as he stepped upon the floor-board, it slipped. He threw out his arms, uttered a shriek, and fell into the water.

"Take hold of my oar!" shouted the father as he arose and thrust it out. The son struggled to do so, and suddenly became rigid. "Wait a moment!" called the father as he started to row. But the son rolled backward, cast a distant look at his father—and sank.

Thord could not believe his eyes. He held the boat still, and stared at the spot where the son had sunk, expecting him to rise again. Some bubbles arose, soon a few more, then only one large one that burst—and the lake was again like a mirror.

For three days and nights the father was seen rowing around this spot without stopping to eat and sleep. He was dragging for his son. And on the third day, in the morning, he found him, and carried him up the hills to his home.

It was perhaps a year after that day that the pastor late one autumn evening heard someone moving slowly in the hallway before his door, and fumbling cautiously for the latch. The pastor opened the door, and in stepped a tall man, thin, stooping, and white of hair. The pastor looked long at him before he knew him. It was Thord.

"You are out late," said the pastor, as he stood facing him.

"Yes, I am out late," said Thord, as he sat down.

The pastor, too, sat down, expectant. There was a long silence. Then Thord said: "I have something with me which I should like to give to the poor. I wish to

make it a legacy, bearing my son's name." He then arose, laid the money upon the table, and then sat down again.

The pastor counted it. "This is a good deal of money," he said.

"It is half the price of my farm; I sold it today."

The pastor remained sitting in silence a long time. Finally he asked in a kindly voice: "What do you intend to do now?"

"Something better."

They sat silent for a while, Thord with his eyes on the floor, and the pastor with his eyes on Thord. Then the pastor said slowly and gently: "Now I think that your son has at last become a blessing to you."

"Yes, I think so, too," said Thord. He looked up, and two tears ran slowly down his face.

THE BIRTHMARK[1]

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

In the latter part of the last century there lived a man of science, an eminent proficient in every branch of natural philosophy, who not long before our story opens had made experience of a spiritual affinity more attractive than any chemical one. He had left his laboratory to the care of an assistant, cleared his fine countenance from the furnace-smoke, washed the stain of acids from his fingers, and persuaded a beautiful woman to become his wife. In those days, when the comparatively recent discovery of electricity and other kindred mysteries of Nature seemed to open paths into the region of miracle, it was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of woman in its depth and absorbing energy. The higher intellect, the imagination, the spirit, and even the heart might all find their congenial ailment in pursuits which, as some of their ardent votaries believed, would ascend from one step of powerful intelligence to another, until the philosopher should lay his hand on the secret of creative force and perhaps make new worlds for himself. We know not whether Aylmer possessed this degree of faith in man's ultimate control over nature. He had devoted himself, however, too unreservedly to scientific studies ever to be weakened from them by any second passion. His love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two; but it could only be by inter-

[1] Published in the March, 1843, number of *The Pioneer*, edited by J. R. Lowell. Republished in *Mosses from an Old Manse* in 1846.

twining itself with his love of science and uniting the strength of the latter to his own.

Such a union accordingly took place, and was attended with truly remarkable consequences and a deeply impressive moral. One day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer sat gazing at his wife with a trouble in his countenance that grew stronger until he spoke.

"Georgiana," said he, "has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed?"

"No, indeed," said she, smiling; but, perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply. "To tell you the truth, it has been so often called a charm, that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so."

"Ah, upon another face perhaps it might," replied her husband; "but never on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection."

"Shocks you, my husband!" cried Georgiana, deeply hurt; at first reddening with momentary anger, but then bursting into tears. "Then why did you take me from my mother's side? You cannot love what shocks you!"

To explain this conversation, it must be mentioned that in the centre of Georgiana's left cheek there was a singular mark, deeply interwoven, as it were, with the texture and substance of her face. In the usual state of her complexion—a healthy though delicate bloom—the mark wore a tint of deeper crimson, which imperfectly defined its shape amid the surrounding rosiness. When she blushed it gradually became more indistinct, and finally vanished amid the triumphant rush of blood that bathed the whole cheek with its brilliant glow. But if any shifting emotion caused her to turn pale, there was the mark again, a crimson stain upon the snow, in what Aylmer sometimes deemed an almost fearful distinctness. Its

shape bore not a little similarity to the human hand, though of the smallest pygmy size. Georgiana's lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth-hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek, and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts. Many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand. It must not be concealed, however, that the impression wrought by this fairy sign-manual varied exceedingly according to the difference of temperament in the beholders. Some fastidious persons—but they were exclusively of her own sex—affirmed that the bloody hand, as they chose to call it, quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana's beauty and rendered her countenance even hideous. But it would be as reasonable to say that one of those small blue stains which sometimes occur in the purest statuary marble would convert the Eve of Powers to a monster. Masculine observers, if the birthmark did not heighten their admiration, contented themselves with wishing it away, that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness without the semblance of a flaw. After his marriage,—for he thought little or nothing of the matter before,—Aylmer discovered that this was the case with himself.

Had she been less beautiful,—if Envy's self could have found aught else to sneer at,—he might have felt his affection heightened by the prettiness of this mimic hand, now vaguely portrayed, now lost, now stealing forth again, and glimmering to and fro with every pulse of emotion that throbbed within her heart; but, seeing her otherwise so perfect, he found this one defect grow more and more intolerable with every moment of their united lives. It was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and

finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain. The crimson hand expressed the ineludible gripe in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frames return to dust. In this manner, selecting it as the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death, Aylmer's sombre imagination was not long in rendering the birthmark a frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana's beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight.

At all the seasons which should have been their happiest he invariably, and without intending it, nay, in spite of a purpose to the contrary, reverted to this one disastrous topic. Trifling as it at first appeared, it so connected itself with innumerable trains of thought and modes of feeling that it became the central point of all. With the morning twilight Aylmer opened his eyes upon his wife's face and recognized the symbol of imperfection; and when they sat together at the evening hearth his eyes wandered stealthily to her cheek, and beheld, flickering with the blaze of the wood-fire, the spectral hand that wrote mortality where he would fain have worshipped. Georgiana soon learned to shudder at his gaze. It needed but a glance with the peculiar expression that his face often wore to change the roses of her cheek into a deathlike paleness, amid which the crimson hand was brought strongly out, like a bas-relief of ruby on the whitest marble.

Late one night, when the lights were growing dim so as hardly to betray the stain on the poor wife's cheek, she herself, for the first time, voluntarily took up the subject.

"Do you remember, my dear Aylmer," said she, with a feeble attempt at a smile, "have you any recollection of a dream last night about this odious hand?"

"None! none whatever!" replied Aylmer, starting; but then he added, in a dry, cold tone, affected for the sake of concealing the real depth of his emotion, "I might well dream of it; for, before I fell asleep, it had taken a pretty firm hold of my fancy."

"And you did dream of it?" continued Georgiana, hastily; for she dreaded lest a gush of tears should interrupt what she had to say. "A terrible dream! I wonder that you can forget it. Is it possible to forget this one expression?—'It is in her heart now; we must have it out!' Reflect, my husband; for by all means I would have you recall that dream."

The mind is in a sad state when Sleep, the all-involving, cannot confine her spectres within the dim region of her sway, but suffers them to break forth, affrighting this actual life with secrets that perchance belong to a deeper one. Aylmer now remembered his dream. He had fancied himself with his servant Aminadab attempting an operation for the removal of the birthmark; but the deeper went the knife, the deeper sank the hand, until at length its tiny grasp appeared to have caught hold of Georgiana's heart; whence, however, her husband was inexorably resolved to cut or wrench it away.

When the dream had shaped itself perfectly in his memory, Aylmer sat in his wife's presence with a guilty feeling. Truth often finds its way to the mind close muffled in robes of sleep, and then speaks with uncompromising directness of matters in regard to which we practice an unconscious self-deception during our waking moments. Until now he had not been aware of the tyrannizing influence acquired by one idea over his mind, and of the lengths which he might find in his heart to go for the sake of giving himself peace.

"Aylmer," resumed Georgiana, solemnly, "I know not what may be the cost to both of us to rid me of this fatal birthmark. Perhaps its removal may cause cureless de-

formity; or it may be the stain goes as deep as life itself. Again: do we know that there is a possibility, on any terms, of unclasping the firm gripe of this little hand which was laid upon me before I came into the world?"

"Dearest Georgiana, I have spent much thought upon the subject," hastily interrupted Aylmer. "I am convinced of the perfect practicability of its removal."

"If there be the remotest possibility of it," continued Georgiana, "let the attempt be made, at whatever risk. Danger is nothing to me; for life, while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror and disgust,—life is a burden which I would fling down with joy. Either remove this dreadful hand, or take my wretched life! You have deep science. All the world bears witness of it. You have achieved great wonders. Cannot you remove this little, little mark, which I cover with the tips of two small fingers? Is this beyond your power, for the sake of your own peace, and to save your poor wife from madness?"

"Noblest, dearest, tenderest wife," cried Aylmer, rapturously, "doubt not my power. I have already given this matter the deepest thought,—thought which might almost have enlightened me to create a being less perfect than yourself. Georgiana, you have led me deeper than ever into the heart of science. I feel myself fully competent to render this dear cheek as faultless as its fellow; and then, most beloved, what will be my triumph when I shall have corrected what Nature left imperfect in her fairest work! Even Pygmalion, when his sculptured woman assumed life, felt not greater ecstasy than mine will be."

"It is resolved, then," said Georgiana, faintly smiling. "And, Aylmer, spare me not, though you should find the birthmark take refuge in my heart at last."

Her husband tenderly kissed her cheek,—her right

cheek,—not that which bore the impress of the crimson hand.

The next day Aylmer apprised his wife of a plan that he had formed whereby he might have opportunity for the intense thought and constant watchfulness which the proposed operation would require, while Georgiana, likewise, would enjoy the perfect repose essential to its success. They were to seclude themselves in the extensive apartments occupied by Aylmer, as a laboratory, and where, during his toilsome youth, he had made discoveries in the elemental powers of nature that had roused the admiration of all the learned societies in Europe. Seated calmly in this laboratory, the pale philosopher had investigated the secrets of the highest cloud-region and of the profoundest mines; he had satisfied himself of the causes that kindled and kept alive the fires of the volcano; and had explained the mystery of fountains, and how it is that they gush forth, some so bright and pure, and others with such rich medicinal virtues, from the dark bosom of the earth. Here, too, at an earlier period, he had studied the wonders of the human frame, and attempted to fathom the very process by which Nature assimilates all her precious influences from earth and air, and from the spiritual world, to create and foster man, her masterpiece. The latter pursuit, however, Aylmer had long laid aside in unwilling recognition of the truth—against which all seekers sooner or later stumble—that our great creative Mother, while she amuses us with apparently working in the broadest sunshine, is yet severely careful to keep her own secrets, and, in spite of her pretended openness, shows us nothing but results. She permits us, indeed, to mar, but seldom to mend, and, like a jealous patentee, on no account to make. Now, however, Aylmer resumed these half-forgotten investigations; not, of course, with such hopes or wishes as first suggested them; but because they involved much physio-

logical truth and lay in the path of his proposed scheme for the treatment of Georgiana.

As he led her over the threshold of the laboratory Georgiana was cold and tremulous. Aylmer looked cheerfully into her face, with intent to reassure her, but was so startled with the intense glow of the birthmark upon the whiteness of her cheek that he could not restrain a strong convulsive shudder. His wife fainted.

"Aminadab! Aminadab!" shouted Aylmer, stamping violently on the floor.

Forthwith there issued from an inner apartment a man of low stature, but bulky frame, with shaggy hair hanging about his visage, which was grimed with the vapors of the furnace. This personage had been Aylmer's underworker during his whole scientific career, and was admirably fitted for that office by his great mechanical readiness, and the skill with which, while incapable of comprehending a single principle, he executed all the details of his master's experiments. With his vast strength, his shaggy hair, his smoky aspect, and the indescribable earthiness that incrusted him, he seemed to represent man's physical nature; while Aylmer's slender figure, and pale, intellectual face, were no less apt a type of the spiritual element.

"Throw open the door of the boudoir, Aminadab," said Aylmer, "and burn a pastil."

"Yes, master," answered Aminadab, looking intently at the lifeless form of Georgiana; and then he muttered to himself, "If she were my wife, I'd never part with that birthmark."

When Georgiana recovered consciousness she found herself breathing an atmosphere of penetrating fragrance, the gentle potency of which had recalled her from her deathlike faintness. The scene around her looked like enchantment. Aylmer had converted those smoky, dingy, sombre rooms, where he had spent his brightest years in

recondite pursuits, into a series of beautiful apartments not unfit to be the secluded abode of a lovely woman. The walls were hung with gorgeous curtains, which imparted the combination of grandeur and grace that no other species of adornment can achieve; and, as they fell from the ceiling to the floor, their rich and ponderous folds, concealing all angles and straight lines, appeared to shut in the scene from infinite space. For aught Georgiana knew, it might be a pavilion among the clouds. And Aylmer, excluding the sunshine, which would have interfered with his chemical processes, had supplied its place with perfumed lamps, emitting flames of various hue, but all uniting in a soft, impurpled radiance. He now knelt by his wife's side, watching her earnestly, but without alarm; for he was confident in his science, and felt that he could draw a magic circle round her within which no evil might intrude.

"Where am I? Ah, I remember," said Georgiana, faintly; and she placed her hand over her cheek to hide the terrible mark from her husband's eyes.

"Fear not, dearest!" exclaimed he. "Do not shrink from me! Believe me, Georgiana, I even rejoice in this single imperfection, since it will be such a rapture to remove it."

"O, spare me!" sadly replied his wife. "Pray do not look at it again. I never can forget that convulsive shudder."

In order to soothe Georgiana, and, as it were, to release her mind from the burden of actual things, Aylmer now put in practice some of the light and playful secrets which science had taught him among its profounder lore. Airy figures, absolutely bodiless ideas, and forms of unsubstantial beauty came and danced before her, imprinting their momentary footsteps on beams of light. Though she had some indistinct idea of the method of these optical phenomena, still the illusion was almost perfect enough

to warrant the belief that her husband possessed sway over the spiritual world. Then again, when she felt a wish to look forth from her seclusion, immediately, as if her thoughts were answered, the procession of external existence flitted across a screen. The scenery and the figures of actual life were perfectly represented, but with that bewitching yet indescribable difference which always makes a picture, an image, or a shadow so much more attractive than the original. When wearied of this, Aylmer bade her cast her eyes upon a vessel containing a quantity of earth. She did so with little interest at first; but was soon startled to perceive the germ of a plant shooting upward from the soil. Then came the slender stalk; the leaves gradually unfolded themselves; and amid them was a perfect and lovely flower.

"It is magical!" cried Georgiana. "I dare not touch it."

"Nay, pluck it," answered Aylmer,—"pluck it, and inhale its brief perfume while you may. The flower will wither in a few moments and leave nothing save its brown seed-vessels; but thence may be perpetuated a race as ephemeral as itself."

But Georgiana had no sooner touched the flower than the whole plant suffered a blight, its leaves turning coal-black as if by the agency of fire.

"There was too powerful a stimulus," said Aylmer, thoughtfully.

To make up for this abortive experiment, he proposed to take her portrait by a scientific process of his own invention. It was to be effected by rays of light striking upon a polished plate of metal. Georgiana assented; but, on looking at the result, was affrighted to find the features of the portrait blurred and indefinable; while the minute figure of a hand appeared where the cheek should have been. Aylmer snatched the metallic plate and threw it into a jar of corrosive acid.

Soon, however, he forgot these mortifying failures. In the intervals of study and chemical experiment he came to her flushed and exhausted, but seemed invigorated by her presence, and spoke in glowing language of the resources of his art. He gave a history of the long dynasty of the alchemists, who spent so many ages in quest of the universal solvent by which the golden principle might be elicited from all things vile and base. Aylmer appeared to believe that, by the plainest scientific logic, it was altogether within the limits of possibility to discover this long-sought medium. "But," he added, "a philosopher who should go deep enough to acquire the power would attain too lofty a wisdom to stoop to the exercise of it." Not less singular were his opinions in regard to the elixir vitæ. He more than intimated that it was at his option to concoct a liquid that should prolong life for years, perhaps interminably; but that it would produce a discord in nature which all the world, and chiefly the quaffer of the immortal nostrum, would find cause to curse.

"Aylmer, are you in earnest?" asked Georgiana, looking at him with amazement and fear. "It is terrible to possess such power, or even to dream of possessing it."

"O, do not tremble, my love," said her husband. "I would not wrong either you or myself by working such inharmonious effects upon our lives; but I would have you consider how trifling, in comparison, is the skill requisite to remove this little hand."

At the mention of the birthmark, Georgiana, as usual, shrank as if a red-hot iron had touched her cheek.

Again Aylmer applied himself to his labors. She could hear his voice in the distant furnace-room giving directions to Aminadab, whose harsh, uncouth, misshapen tones were audible in response, more like the grunt or growl of a brute than human speech. After hours of absence, Aylmer reappeared and proposed that she should

now examine his cabinet of chemical products and natural treasures of the earth. Among the former he showed her a small vial, in which, he remarked, was contained gentle yet most powerful fragrance, capable of impregnating all the breezes that blow across a kingdom. They were of inestimable value, the contents of that little vial; and, as he said so, he threw some of the perfume into the air and filled the room with piercing and invigorating delight.

"And what is this?" asked Georgiana, pointing to a small crystal globe containing a gold-colored liquid. "It is so beautiful to the eye that I could imagine it the elixir of life."

"In one sense it is," replied Aylmer; "or rather, the elixir of immortality. It is the most precious poison that ever was concocted in this world. By its aid I could apportion the lifetime of any mortal at whom you might point your finger. The strength of the dose would determine whether he were to linger out years, or drop dead in the midst of a breath. No king on his guarded throne could keep his life if I, in my private station, should deem that the welfare of millions justified me in depriving him of it."

"Why do you keep such a terrific drug?" inquired Georgiana, in horror.

"Do not mistrust me, dearest," said her husband, smiling; "its virtuous potency is yet greater than its harmful one. But see! here is a powerful cosmetic. With a few drops of this in a vase of water, freckles may be washed away as easily as the hands are cleansed. A stronger infusion would take the blood out of the cheek, and leave the rosiest beauty a pale ghost."

"Is it with this lotion that you intend to bathe my cheek?" asked Georgiana, anxiously.

"O no," hastily replied her husband; "this is merely

superficial. Your case demands a remedy that shall go deeper."

In his interviews with Georgiana, Aylmer generally made minute inquiries as to her sensations, and whether the confinement of the rooms and the temperature of the atmosphere agreed with her. These questions had such a particular drift that Georgiana began to conjecture that she was already subjected to certain physical influences, either breathed in with the fragrant air or taken with her food. She fancied likewise, but it might be altogether fancy, that there was a stirring up of her system,—a strange, indefinite sensation creeping through her veins, and tingling, half painfully, half pleasurably, at her heart. Still, whenever she dared to look into the mirror, there she beheld herself pale as a white rose and with the crimson birthmark stamped upon her cheek. Not even Aylmer now hated it so much as she.

To dispel the tedium of the hours which her husband found it necessary to devote to the processes of combination and analysis, Georgiana turned over the volumes of his scientific library. In many dark old tomes she met with chapters full of romance and poetry. They were the works of the philosophers of the Middle Ages, such as Albertus Magnus, Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and the famous friar who created the prophetic Brazen Head. All these antique naturalists stood in advance of their centuries, yet were imbued with some of their credulity, and therefore were believed, and perhaps imagined themselves to have acquired from the investigation of nature a power above nature, and from physics a sway over the spiritual world. Hardly less curious and imaginative were the early volumes of the Transactions of the Royal Society, in which the members, knowing little of the limits of natural possibility, were continually recording wonders or proposing methods whereby wonders might be wrought.

But, to Georgiana, the most engrossing volume was a

large folio from her husband's own hand, in which he had recorded every experiment of his scientific career, its original aim, the methods adopted for its development, and its final success or failure, with the circumstances to which either event was attributable. The book, in truth, was both the history and emblem of his ardent, ambitious, imaginative, yet practical and laborious life. He handled physical details as if there were nothing beyond them; yet spiritualized them all, and redeemed himself from materialism by his strong and eager aspiration towards the infinite. In his grasp the veriest clod of earth assumed a soul. Georgiana, as she read, reverenced Aylmer and loved him more profoundly than ever, but with a less entire dependence on his judgment than heretofore. Much as he had accomplished, she could not but observe that his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed. His brightest diamonds were the merest pebbles, and felt to be so by himself, in comparison with the inestimable gems which lay hidden beyond his reach. The volume, rich with achievements that had won renown for its author, was yet as melancholy a record as ever mortal hand had penned. It was the sad confession and continual exemplification of the shortcomings of the composite man, the spirit burdened with clay and working in matter, and of the despair that assails the higher nature at finding itself so miserably thwarted by the earthly part. Perhaps every man of genius, in whatever sphere, might recognize the image of his own experience in Aylmer's journal.

So deeply did these reflections affect Georgiana that she laid her face upon the open volume and burst into tears. In this situation she was found by her husband.

"It is dangerous to read in a sorcerer's books," said he with a smile, though his countenance was uneasy and displeased. "Georgiana, there are pages in that volume

which I can scarcely glance over and keep my senses. Take heed lest it prove as detrimental to you."

"It has made me worship you more than ever," said she.

"Ah, wait for this one success," rejoined he, "then worship me if you will. I shall deem myself hardly unworthy of it. But come, I have sought you for the luxury of your voice. Sing to me, dearest."

So she poured out the liquid music of her voice to quench the thirst of his spirit. He then took his leave with a boyish exuberance of gayety, assuring her that her seclusion would endure but a little longer, and that the result was already certain. Scarcely had he departed when Georgiana felt irresistibly impelled to follow him. She had forgotten to inform Aylmer of a symptom which for two or three hours past had begun to excite her attention. It was a sensation in the fatal birthmark, not painful, but which induced a restlessness throughout her system. Hastening after her husband, she intruded for the first time into the laboratory.

The first thing that struck her eye was the furnace, that hot and feverish worker, with the intense glow of its fire, which by the quantities of soot clustered above it seemed to have been burning for ages. There was a distilling-apparatus in full operation. Around the room were retorts, tubes, cylinders, crucibles, and other apparatus of chemical research. An electrical machine stood ready for immediate use. The atmosphere felt oppressively close, and was tainted with gaseous odors which had been tormented forth by the processes of science. The severe and homely simplicity of the apartment, with its naked walls and brick pavement, looked strange, accustomed as Georgiana had become to the fantastic elegance of her boudoir. But what chiefly, indeed almost solely, drew her attention, was the aspect of Aylmer himself.

He was pale as death, anxious and absorbed, and hung

over the furnace as if it depended upon his utmost watchfulness whether the liquid which it was distilling should be the draught of immortal happiness or misery. How different from the sanguine and joyous mien that he had assumed for Georgiana's encouragement!

"Carefully now, Aminadab; carefully, thou human machine; carefully, thou man of clay," muttered Aylmer, more to himself than his assistant. "Now, if there be a thought too much or too little, it is all over."

"Ho! ho!" mumbled Aminadab. "Look, master! look!"

Aylmer raised his eyes hastily, and at first reddened, then grew paler than ever, on beholding Georgiana. He rushed toward her and seized her arm with a gripe that left the print of his fingers upon it.

"Why do you come thither? Have you no trust in your husband?" cried he, impetuously. "Would you throw the blight of that fatal birthmark over my labors? It is not well done. Go, prying woman! go!"

"Nay, Aylmer," said Georgiana with the firmness of which she possessed no stinted endowment, "it is not you that have a right to complain. You mistrust your wife; you have concealed the anxiety with which you watch the development of this experiment. Think not so unworthily of me, my husband. Tell me all the risk we run, and fear not that I shall shrink; for my share in it is far less than your own."

"No, no, Georgiana!" said Aylmer, impatiently; "it must not be."

"I submit," replied she, calmly. "And, Aylmer, I shall quaff whatever draught you bring me; but it will be on the same principle that would induce me to take a dose of poison if offered by your hand."

"My noble wife," said Aylmer, deeply moved, "I knew not the height and depth of your nature until now. Nothing shall be concealed. Know, then, that this crimson

hand, superficial as it seems, has clutched its grasp into your being with a strength of which I had no previous conception. I have already administered agents powerful enough to do aught except to change your entire physical system. Only one thing remains to be tried. If that fail us we are ruined."

"Why did you hesitate to tell me this?" asked she.

"Because, Georgiana," said Aylmer, in a low voice, "there is danger."

"Danger? There is but one danger—that this horrible stigma shall be left upon my cheek!" cried Georgiana. "Remove it, remove it, whatever be the cost, or we shall both go mad!"

"Heaven knows your words are too true," said Aylmer, sadly. "And now, dearest, return to your boudoir. In a little while all will be tested."

He conducted her back and took leave of her with a solemn tenderness which spoke far more than his words how much was now at stake. After his departure Georgiana became rapt in musings. She considered the character of Aylmer, and did it completer justice than at any previous moment. Her heart exulted, while it trembled, at his honorable love—so pure and lofty that it would accept nothing less than perfection, nor miserably make itself contented with an earthlier nature than he had dreamed of. She felt how much more precious was such a sentiment than that meaner kind which would have borne with the imperfection for her sake, and have been guilty of treason to holy love by degrading its perfect idea to the level of the actual; and with her whole spirit she prayed that, for a single moment, she might satisfy his highest and deepest conception. Longer than one moment she well knew it could not be me; for his spirit was ever on the march, ever ascending, and each instant required something that was beyond the scope of the instant before.

The sound of her husband's footsteps aroused her.

He bore a crystal goblet containing a liquor colorless as water, but bright enough to be the draught of immortality. Aylmer was pale; but it seemed rather the consequence of a highly wrought state of mind and tension of spirit than of fear or doubt.

"The concoction of the draught has been perfect," said he, in answer to Georgiana's look. "Unless all my science have deceived me, it cannot fail."

"Save on your account, my dearest Aylmer," observed his wife, "I might wish to put off this birthmark of mortality by relinquishing mortality itself in preference to any other mode. Life is but a sad possession to those who have attained precisely the degree of moral advancement at which I stand. Were I weaker and blinder, it might be happiness. Were I stronger, it might be endured hopefully. But, being what I find myself, methinks I am of all mortals the most fit to die."

"You are fit for heaven without tasting death!" replied her husband. "But why do we speak of dying? The draught cannot fail. Behold its effect upon this plant."

On the window-seat there stood a geranium diseased with yellow blotches, which had overspread all its leaves. Aylmer poured a small quantity of the liquid upon the soil in which it grew. In a little time, when the roots of the plant had taken up the moisture, the unsightly blotches began to be extinguished in a living verdure.

"There needed no proof," said Georgiana, quietly. "Give me the goblet. I joyfully stake all upon your word."

"Drink, then, thou lofty creature!" exclaimed Aylmer, with fervid admiration. "There is no taint of imperfection on thy spirit. Thy sensible frame, too, shall soon be all perfect."

She quaffed the liquid and returned the goblet to his hand.

"It is grateful," said she, with a placid smile. "Me-

thinks it is like water from a heavenly fountain; for it contains I know not what of unobtrusive fragrance and deliciousness. It allays a feverish thirst that had parched me for many days. Now, dearest, let me sleep. My earthly senses are closing over my spirit like the leaves around the heart of a rose at sunset."

She spoke the last words with a gentle reluctance, as if it required almost more energy than she could command to pronounce the faint and lingering syllables. Scarcely had they loitered through her lips ere she was lost in slumber. Aylmer sat by her side, watching her aspect with the emotions proper to a man, the whole value of whose existence was involved in the process now to be tested. Mingled with this mood, however, was the philosophic investigation characteristic of the man of science. Not the minutest symptom escaped him. A heightened flush of the cheek, a slight irregularity of breath, a quiver of the eyelid, a hardly perceptible tremor through the frame—such were the details which, as the moments passed, he wrote down in his folio volume. Intense thought had set its stamp upon every previous page of that volume; but the thoughts of years were all concentrated upon the last.

While thus employed, he failed not to gaze often at the fatal hand, and not without a shudder. Yet once, by a strange and unaccountable impulse, he pressed it with his lips. His spirit recoiled, however, in the very act; and Georgiana, out of the midst of her deep sleep, moved uneasily, and murmured, as if in remonstrance. Again Aylmer resumed his watch. Nor was it without avail. The crimson hand, which at first had been strongly visible upon the marble paleness of Georgiana's cheek, now grew more faintly outlined. She remained not less pale than ever; but the birthmark, with every breath that came and went, lost somewhat of its former distinctness. Its presence had been awful; its departure was more awful still. Watch the stain of the rainbow fading

out of the sky, and you will know how that mysterious symbol passed away.

"By Heaven! it is well-nigh gone!" said Aylmer to himself, in almost irrepressible ecstasy. "I can scarcely trace it now. Success! success! And now it is like the faintest rose color. The lightest flush of blood across her cheek would overcome it. But she is so pale!"

He drew aside the window-curtain and suffered the light of natural day to fall into the room and rest upon her cheek. At the same time he heard a gross, hoarse chuckle, which he had long known as his servant Aminadab's expression of delight.

"Ah, clod! ah, earthly mass!" cried Aylmer, laughing in a sort of frenzy, "you have served me well! Matter and spirit—earth and heaven—have both done their part in this! Laugh, thing of the senses! You have earned the right to laugh."

These exclamations broke Georgiana's sleep. She slowly unclosed her eyes and gazed into the mirror which her husband had arranged for that purpose. A faint smile flitted over her lips when she recognized how barely perceptible was now that crimson hand which had once blazed forth with such disastrous brilliancy as to scare away all their happiness. But then her eyes sought Aylmer's face with a trouble and anxiety that he could by no means account for.

"My poor Aylmer!" murmured she.

"Poor? Nay, richest, happiest, most favored!" exclaimed he. "My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!"

"My poor Aylmer," she repeated, with a more than human tenderness, "you have aimed loftily; you have done nobly. Do not repent that, with so high and pure a feeling, you have rejected the best the earth could offer. Aylmer, dearest Aylmer, I am dying!"

Alas! it was too true! The fatal hand had grappled

with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame. As the last crimson tint of the birthmark—that sole token of human imperfection—faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight. Then a hoarse, chuckling laugh was heard again! Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence which, in this dim sphere of half-development, demands the completeness of a higher state. Yet, had Aylmer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

EDGAR ALLAN POE

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. *At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled—but the very infinitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile *now* was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practise imposture upon the British and Austrian *millionaires*. In painting and gemmary, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially;—I was skilful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme

madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him—"my dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking to-day. But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts."

"How?" said he. "Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchresi. If any one has a critical turn it is he. He will tell me ——"

"Luchresi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

"And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

"Come, let us go."

"Whither?"

"To your vaults."

"My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchresi ——"

"I have no engagement;—come."

"My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The

vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre."

"Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchresi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

"Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm; and putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a *roquelaure* closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honour of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

"The pipe," he said.

"It is farther on," said I; "but observe the white webwork which gleams from these cavern walls."

He turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.

"Nitre?" he asked, at length.

"Nitre," I replied. "How long have you had that cough?"

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh! —ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!"

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

"It is nothing," he said, at last.

"Come," I said, with decision, "we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchresi ——"

"Enough," he said; "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True—true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily—but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damps."

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

"I drink," he said, "to the buried that repose around us."

"And I to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

"These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."

"And the motto?"

"*Nemo me impune lacessit.*"

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had

passed through long walls of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"The nitre!" I said; "see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough ——"

"It is nothing," he said; "let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grâve. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

"You do not comprehend?" he said.

"Not I," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood."

"How?"

"You are not of the masons."

"Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said, "a sign."

"It is this," I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my *roquelaure* a trowel.

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us proceed to the Amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior crypt or recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

"Proceed," I said; "herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchresi ——"

"He is an ignoramus," interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is *very* damp. Once more let me *implore* you to return. No? Then I must

positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power."

"The Amontillado!" ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"True," I replied; "the Amontillado."

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated, I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall; I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I

re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamour grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognising as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said—

"Ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he!—a very good joke, indeed —an excellent jest. We shall have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!"

"The Amontillado!" I said.

"He! he! he!—he! he! he!—yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone."

"Yes," I said, "let us be gone."

"For the love of God, Montresor!"

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud—

"Fortunato!"

No answer. I called again—

"Fortunato!"

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so. I hastened to make an end of my labour. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*

THE ADOPTION [1]

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Translated by Michael Monahan

Side by side stood the two poor cottages, at the foot of a low hill, not far from a little seaside resort. The two peasants labored desperately on the barren land in order to bring up their families, each household having four children. Before the two neighboring doors all the young ones swarmed, played and fought from morning till night. The two eldest were six years old, and the two youngest about fifteen months: the marriages and then the births had taken place almost simultaneously in both households.

Hardly could the two mothers distinguish their own progeny in the heap of brats; and the two fathers were often confounded entirely. The eight names danced in their heads, were constantly mixed up and confused; and when they wanted to call one child, the men often called three names before getting the right one.

The first of the two hovels, as you come from the watering place of Rolleport, was occupied by the Tuvaches, who had three sons and a daughter; the other sheltered the Vallins, who had a son and three daughters.

Both families subsisted poorly and painfully on soup, potatoes, and especially the fresh air. At seven o'clock each morning, at noon, and at six in the evening, the mothers gathered their young ones for the meal, as the keepers of geese assemble their flock. The children were seated, according to age, before a wooden table varnished

[1] Reprinted from *Love and Other Stories,* of The Modern Library edition, by permission of the publishers, Boni and Liveright.

by a half-century of use. The last urchin could hardly lift his mouth to the level of the table. Before them was placed a large bowl full of bread softened in water in which the potatoes had been cooked, half a cabbage and three onions; and all the line ate until their hunger was appeased. The mother herself fed the littlest one. A bit of meat in the stew on Sundays was a grand feast for all; and on that day the father would linger long over his dinner, often repeating: "I should like to fare as well every day."

One afternoon in August a light carriage stopped suddenly in front of the two cottages, and a young woman, who was driving, herself, said to the gentleman seated beside her:

"Oh, look, Henri, what a swarm of children! Are they not too sweet like that, playing in the dust?"

The gentleman did not answer, accustomed, no doubt, to these bursts of admiration, which were a grief and almost a reproach to him.

The young woman went on:

"I really must hug them! Oh, how I should love to have one of them—that darling there, the littlest one."

Jumping from the carriage she ran to the children, caught one of the two last, a Tuvache, and, lifting him up in her arms, she kissed the child passionately on his dirty cheeks, on his yellow hair tousled and anointed with dirt, on his little hands, which he agitated wildly in order to free himself from her annoying caresses.

Then she climbed into her carriage and drove off rapidly. But she came back the following week, sat herself down on the ground, took the brat in her arms, stuffed him with sweetmeats, gave bonbons to all the others, and played with them like a madcap while her husband waited patiently in the carriage.

Again she returned, made acquaintance with the par-

ents, reappeared every day, her pockets loaded with candies and pennies.

She called herself Madame Henri d'Hubières.

One morning, on arriving as usual, the husband got out of the carriage with her; and without stopping among the children, who knew her well now, she went straight into the house of the Tuvaches.

The parents were there, about to split wood and prepare the supper: very much surprised, they straightened up, offered chairs to the strangers, and sat down, waiting to hear the object of this visit. Then the young woman commenced to speak in an agitated, faltering voice:

"My good people, I have come to see you because I would like very much . . . indeed, I would like very much to take away with me your . . . your little boy."

The peasants, stupefied by this proposition, and unable to think at first, from surprise, made no answer.

She regained her breath, and continued:

"We have no children; we are alone, my husband and I. . . . We would keep the child . . . are you willing to let us have him?"

The peasant woman began to understand. She demanded:

"You want to take our Charlot? Ah, no, for sure, you shall not!"

Then Monsieur d'Hubières interposed:

"My wife has not explained herself very well. We wish to adopt the child, but he shall return to see you. If he turns out well, as there is every reason to believe he will, he shall be our heir. If, by chance, we should have other children, he would share equally with them. On the other hand, if he should not respond to our cares and expectations, we would settle upon him, at his coming of age, a sum of twenty thousand francs, which will be immediately deposited in his name with a notary. And, as we have also thought of his parents, we agree to pay

you during the terms of your lives the sum of one hundred francs a month. Do you understand all this clearly?"

The farmer's wife rose in a fury:

"You want us to sell our Charlot? Ah, no!—that is not a thing to ask of a mother, that. I say no!—it would be an abomination."

The man, looking grave and thoughtful, said not a word, but he approved his wife's decision with a continuous nodding of the head.

Madame d'Hubières, in despair, began to weep, and, turning toward her husband, with a voice full of sobs, the voice of a spoiled child whose every desire is gratified, she cried brokenly:

"They are not willing, Henri, they are not willing!"

Then they made a last attempt to win over the peasants.

"But, my friends, think of your child's future, of his happiness, of ——"

The peasant woman, exasperated, broke in upon him:

"We see it all, we understand it all, and we have made up our mind. Go away now, and I hope we shall never again see either of you around here. It's a crime to wish to take a child like that!"

Then Madame d'Hubières going out, happened to bethink herself that there were *two* very little urchins, and she asked through her tears, with the persistence of a headstrong, spoiled woman who cannot bear to be denied anything:—

"But the other little fellow is not yours, is he?"

Father Tuvache put in at this:

"No, he belongs to the neighbors; you can go to see them if you like." And he turned back into the house, which resounded with the shrill complaints of his wife.

The Vallins, husband and wife, were at table, about to begin operations on some slices of bread on a plate

between them; before eating they rubbed the bread parsimoniously with a very little butter picked at the end of a fork.

Madame d'Hubières again set forth her proposition, but with more address and insinuation this time; also with more cunning and oratorical precaution.

The two rustics at first shook their head in token of denial; but when they learned that they would have a hundred francs each month for themselves, they began to reconsider the matter, consulting each other with furtive looks, very much shaken. They were silent a long time, in a state of painful hesitancy and doubt. Finally the wife demanded:

"Well, what do you say to this, my man?"

He replied in a sententious tone:

"I say it is not to be despised."

Then Madame d'Hubières, who was trembling with anguish and fear of another refusal, spoke of the future of the little one, of his happiness, and of all the money he would be able to give them later on.

The farmer demanded:

"This pension of twelve hundred francs, will it be promised before the notary?"

Madame d'Hubières replied: "Yes, certainly, and it shall begin to-morrow."

The farmer's wife, who had been meditating, here broke in:

"A hundred francs a month is not enough to deprive us of the little one; he would be working in a few years, this child. I say we ought to have fifteen hundred francs."

Madame d'Hubières, who was fidgeting with impatience, granted this demand at once; and as she wished to take the child then and there, she gave a hundred francs to the parents as a gift, while her husband drew up a contract in writing. The mayor and a neighbor were called in at this point, and obligingly acted as witnesses.

At last the young woman, radiant with triumph, carried off the screaming child, as one seizes a passionately desired bibelot at an auction.

The Tuvaches, from their door, witnessed this final scene of the negotiations; they were silent, severe, perhaps regretting their refusal.

There was no more talk heard about little Jean Vallin. Each month his parents went to draw their hundred and fifty francs at the notary's; and they were angry with their neighbors because Mother Tuvache pursued them with insults, constantly repeating from door to door that folks must be unnatural to sell their child—that it was a horror, a dirty thing, a corruption!

Sometimes she caught up her Charlot in her arms, proudly and defiantly, crying to him as if the child could understand:

"I did not sell *you,* not I; I did not sell *my* little one. I do not sell my children—no, no! I am not rich, but I do not sell my children."

During years and years that followed there were thus every day some insulting allusions vociferated at open door or window so as to reach the neighboring house. Mother Tuvache had finished by believing herself superior in virtue to all the country because she had not sold Charlot. And people, happening to speak of her, would say:

"I know it was a very tempting chance for poor folks, but all the same she acted like a good mother."

She was cited for this heroic virtue throughout the district, and Charlot who was now entering upon his nineteenth year, having been brought up in this idea, which was constantly dinned into him, judged himself better than his comrades because his parents had not sold him!

Meantime the Vallins lived at their ease, thanks to the

pension; the unappeasable wrath of the Tuvaches, who had remained poor and miserable, arose from this fact. Their eldest son went away to serve his term as a soldier. The second died; and Charlot was left alone to labor with the old father, in support of his mother and two young sisters. He was just touching twenty-one, when one morning a showy carriage stopped before the two cottages. A young gentleman wearing a gold watch and chain, alighted, giving his hand to an old white-haired lady. The old lady said to him:

"It is there, my child, at the second house."

And as if he found himself at home there, he walked straight into the Vallins' cottage.

The old woman was washing her aprons; the old man, now infirm, was dozing near the hearth. Both looked up at his entrance, and the young man said:

"Good day, Papa; good day, Mamma." They rose up, frightened. The peasant woman, in her emotion, dropped the soap into the water, and she stammered: "Oh, is it you, my child? Is it you, my child?"

He took her in his arms and hugged her, repeating:

"Good day, Mamma." While the old man, all a-tremble, said in the calm tone which he never lost: "Ah, here you are back again, Jean!" As if he had seen the young man a few months before.

When they had made an end of greetings and had fully recognized each other, the parents wished to take their son out at once, in order to show him off amongst the neighbors. Accordingly they conducted him proudly to the mayor's house, then to the deputy mayor, to the priest and to the schoolmaster.

Charlot, standing in the doorway of his cottage, saw the fortunate prodigal go by. That evening, at the supper table, he said to the old woman:

"You must have been stupid to let those rich people take the Vallins' boy."

His mother replied obstinately:

"We did not wish to sell our child!"

Father Tuvache said nothing. And the son cried out:

"Is it not unfortunate to be sacrificed like that?"

Then the old man exclaimed in an angry tone:

"Are you going to blame us for having kept you?"

The son came back brutally:

"Yes, I blame it to you, because you are only fools. Such parents as you make the misfortune of children. You deserve that I should quit you."

The good woman was weeping in her plate. She moaned all the time while swallowing some spoonfuls of soup, the half of which she spilled:

"But you can kill yourself to bring up your children!"

Then the young man said rudely:

"I would rather not have been born than to be what I am. When I saw that fellow this afternoon, my heart almost stopped. I said to myself: Look what you might be now!"

He rose from his chair.

"See here! I know well that I would do better to go away because if I stay I shall be throwing this thing up to you from morning till night, and making your life miserable. And I'm never going to be able to forgive you, never!"

The old couple said not a word, but listened in grief and stupefaction.

He went on:

"No, the idea of staying here would be too hard. I would far rather go away and seek my living elsewhere."

He opened the door. A noise of voices entered. The Vallins were celebrating with the son who had returned.

Then Charlot, stamping his foot, turned towards his parents, and cried:

"Wretches, I am done with you!"

And he flung away into the night.

MOONLIGHT[1]

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

The Abbé Marignan bore worthily his martial name. He was a tall, thin priest, fanatical, with a soul always exalted but just. All his beliefs were fixed, with never a doubt or wavering. He imagined sincerely that he knew his God, that he was able to penetrate His designs, His wishes, His intentions.

When he promenaded with great strides in the alley of his little country presbytery, sometimes a question formed itself in his mind: "Why has God done that?" And he sought to know the reason obstinately, taking in his thought the place of God; and almost always he found it. It was not he who would then have murmured in a transport of pious humility, "Lord, Thy designs are impenetrable!" He said to himself, "I am God's servant, I ought to know His reasons for acting and to divine them if I do not know them."

Everything in nature seemed to him created with an absolute and admirable logic: the "Wherefore" and the "Because" always balanced themselves. The dawns were made in order to render joyous the awakenings, the days to ripen the harvests, the rains to water them, the evenings to prepare for slumber, and the somber nights for sleep.

The four seasons corresponded perfectly to all the needs of agriculture, and never would the slightest suspicion have occurred to the priest that Nature has no intentions and that all that lives has, on the contrary, adapted

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itself to the hard necessities of epochs, of climates and of matter.

But he hated woman; he hated her unconsciously and he despised her by instinct. Often he repeated the words of Christ: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" And he added, "One would say that God Himself was dissatisfied with this work of His hands!" Woman was indeed to him the child twelve times impure of whom the poet speaks. She was the temptress who had ruined the first man and who continued always her work of destruction; the feeble, dangerous, mysteriously troubling creature. And even more than her body of perdition he hated her loving soul.

Often he had felt the tenderness of woman attached to himself, and although he knew himself unassailable, he became exasperated at this need of loving which trembles always in their hearts.

God, in this good priest's opinion, had created woman only in order to try man and to prove him. One should approach her only with defensive precautions and the fear one has of snares. She was indeed the perfect image of a snare, with her arms extended and her lips open toward man.

He had no indulgence for the sex, excepting only the *religieuses* or nuns whom their vows rendered inoffensive; but he treated even them harshly, because he felt that there was always living there in the recesses of their chained and humiliated hearts that eternal tenderness which awoke even for him, a priest!

He felt it in their glances, more humid with piety than the regards of the monks, in their ecstasies in which their sex mingled itself, in their transports of love for Christ which angered him because it was the love of woman, carnal love. He felt it, this cursed tenderness, in their very docility and obedience, in the softness of their voices

whilst speaking to him, in their lowered eyes, and in their resigned tears when he had answered them rudely.

He shook his soutane always on issuing from the convent doors and went away at a rapid gait as if he were fleeing before a danger.

The Abbé Marignan had a niece who lived with her mother in a small house near the presbytery. He was desperately bent on making a Sister of Charity of her.

She was pretty, light-headed and impertinent. When the abbé rebuked her she laughed; and when he grew vexed she embraced him vehemently, pressing him against her heart, while he sought involuntarily to disengage himself from this embrace, which nevertheless caused him to taste a subtle joy, awakening in him that sensation of paternity that sleeps in every man.

Often he talked to her of God, of *his* God, when marching by her side through the field paths. She scarcely heard him the while she looked at the sky, the grass, the flowers, with a sheer happiness of living that mirrored itself in her eyes. Sometimes she darted forward to catch a butterfly and cried on bringing it back in triumph: "Look, uncle, how pretty it is! I would like to kiss it." And this need of "kissing" something, bees or lilac flowers, disturbed, irritated and angered the good priest, who found in all this the same ineradicable tenderness which germs eternally in the hearts of women.

Now, one day the sexton's wife, who kept house for the priest, informed him, with much precaution, that his niece had a lover. He was terribly shocked, and he stood silent, almost suffocated with emotion; his face covered with soap, for he was in the act of shaving.

When he had somewhat recovered himself and was able to reflect, he cried: "It is not true—you lie, Mélanie!"

The peasant woman placed her hand on her heart:

"God is my judge that I do not lie, Monsieur l'Abbé. I tell you she goes to see him every night as soon as your sister is abed. They meet down by the river. You have only to go there between ten o'clock and midnight."

The Abbé Marignan stopped scratching his chin, and he began to march violently to and fro, as he did always in his hours of grave meditation. When he resumed shaving he cut himself three times between nose and ear.

All that day he was silent; swollen with rage and resentment. To his fury as a priest against this invincible love was added the exasperation of a moral father, a guardian, a shepherd of souls, deceived, robbed, tricked by a child—that egotistical resentment of parents to whom their daughter announces that, without them and in spite of them, she has chosen a husband.

After dining the Abbé Marignan tried to read a little, but he was unable to settle his mind to it; and he became more and more exasperated. When ten o'clock struck he took his cane, a formidable oaken cudgel, which he carried always in his nightly walks when he went to see some sick parishioner. And he smiled as he surveyed the huge club which he twirled in his solid fist with a menacing whirl. Then suddenly he rose, and, grinding his teeth, brought it down on a chair, splitting the back, which fell to the floor.

He opened the door to go out; but he stopped on the threshold, surprised by such a splendor of moonlight as is rarely seen. And as he was endowed with an exalted mind, a mind such as the Fathers of the Church, those poetical dreamers, must have had, he felt himself suddenly distracted, moved by the grand, serene beauty of the pale night.

In his little garden, all bathed with soft light, his fruit trees, ranged in a row, outlined in shadow across the alley their frail limbs scarcely covered with verdure; while the giant honeysuckle climbing up the wall of his house ex-

haled a delicious and, as it were, sugared aroma, causing to float in the warm, bright night a kind of perfumed soul.

He began to breathe long, deep breaths, drinking the air as drunkards do wine; and presently he walked away at a slow pace, ravished and wondering,—almost forgetting his niece.

As soon as he was in the open country he stopped to contemplate all the plain inundated with this caressing radiance, drowned in this tender and languishing charm of serene nights. Momentarily the frogs uttered through space their short, metallic note, and some distant nightingales mingled their scattered music, which makes one dream without making one think—their music gay and vibrant, made for kisses, for the seduction of moonlight.

The priest resumed his march, his heart failing him, without his knowing why. He felt himself enfeebled and as it were, suddenly exhausted; he wished to sit down, to remain there, to contemplate, to admire God in His work.

Down there, following the undulations of the little river, a long line of poplars could be traced in serpentine perspective. A fine mist, a white vapor which the moonrays traversed, silvered and made luminous, hung suspended above and around the trees, enveloping all the tortuous course of the stream with a sort of light and transparent haze.

The Abbé Marignan stopped again, penetrated to the depths of his soul by an increasing, irresistible emotion. And a doubt, a vague disquietude invaded him, while there rose in his mind one of those interrogations which he sometimes proposed to himself.

Why had God made this? Since the night is intended for sleep, for unconsciousness, for repose, for forgetfulness of all, why did He render it more charming than the

day, sweeter than the dawns and the evenings? And this slow and seducing star, more poetical than the sun and which seems destined, so discreet is it, to illumine things too delicate and mysterious for the garish light of day—why does it come to make the shadows so transparent?

Why does not the most gifted of singing birds sleep when the others sleep; why does he set himself to sing in the troubling shadow?

Why is this half-veil thrown upon the world? Why those shivers of the heart, this emotion of the soul, this languishment of the flesh? Why this unfolding of seductions which men do not see, since they are asleep in their beds? For whom was intended this sublime spectacle, this abundance of poesy poured from heaven upon the earth?

The Abbé Marignan did not understand.

But lo! down there, on the border of the prairie, under the vault of trees covered with shining mist, two shadows appeared, marching side by side.

The man was the taller and held the girl embraced about the neck and shoulders; from time to time he kissed her on the forehead. They suddenly animated this motionless landscape, which enveloped them like a divine frame made for them alone. They seemed, these two, like a single being, the being for whom this calm and silent night was destined; and they came towards the priest like a living response—the response which his Master made to his interrogation!

He remained standing, his heart beating rapidly, overwhelmed with emotion; and he believed he saw something Biblical, like the love of Ruth and Boaz, the accomplishment of the Lord's will in one of those grand scenes of which the Holy Book tells us. And in his head there began a chanting of the verses of the Song of Songs, the cries of passion, the appeals of the flesh, all the warm poesy of that sublime Poem burning with love.

He said to himself: "Perhaps God has made these nights in order to veil with the ideal the loves of men."

He retreated before this enlaced couple, still marching toward him. It was his niece, notwithstanding; but he asked himself if he had not been on the point of offending, disobeying God. Does not God permit love, since He surrounds it visibly with such a splendor? . . .

And he fled from the scene, bewildered, almost ashamed, as though he had penetrated into a temple where he had not the right to enter.

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INDEX

A

Abstractions, 140
Action,
  final, 92
  in crisis, 23
Agents, literary, 167
Alternating emotions, 87
Anderson, Sherwood, 129
  I'm a Fool, 50, 117
  I Want to Know Why, 141
  Man's Story, The, 20
Angle of narration, 111-121
Appeal to senses, 139
Aristotle, theory of drama, 94
Association, 143
Atmosphere, 123-144
Austin, Mary,
  Everyman's Genius, 154
Author, intrusion of, 160
Automatic solution, 20

B

Balzac, Honoré de,
  La Grande Bretêche, 115
  Seashore Drama, The, 19
Beginnings, 145-150
Behaviorism, 105
Bennett, Arnold, 129
Biblical phrases in titles, 164
Bibliography, 283
Bittner, W. S., 107
Björnson, Björnstjerne,
  Father, The, 10, 38, 93, 112, 123,
Blackwood, Algernon,
  Nephele, 19
  Pikestaffe Case, 116
Boccaccio, 94
Brewster and Burrell,
  Dead Reckonings in Fiction, 59, 154
Browning, implication in, 75
Building, plot, 47-57

C

Cabell, James B., 129
Chance, use of, 37
Characterization, 63-101
Coincidence, 39
Complication (see "Plot")
Concentration, effect of, 88-90
Conflict, 25-32
Conrad, Joseph,
  End of the Tether, The, 74, 75
  Heart of Darkness, The, 131, 133, 135
  Preface, *The Nigger of the Narcissus,* 157
  Youth, 100, 130, 135, 140
Consistent ending, 92
Conversation, 76-81
Creative personality, 151-159
Crime, use of, 45
Crisis, action in, 23

Criterion, of good situation, 21
Cumulative effect, 57

D

Dangling clauses, 163
Daudet, Alphonse,
Death of the Dauphin, The, 34, 112
Deep self, 154
Definitions,
atmosphere, 122
plot, 34
setting, 123
short story, 10
Description,
of character, 85
use of, 146
Desire, resisting, 58
Detective story, 52
Distinctive trait, 69
Dramatic, what is, 17-19

E

Effect,
cumulative, 57
emotional, 123
intensity of, 134-139
single, 11-13
Elemental emotions, 26
Endings, 94-101
Environment, effect on character, 126, 130-144
Escape theory, 153
Events, determined by, 56
Expectation, power of, 40
Experience,
effect on character, 126
understanding of, 155
use of, 65, 156

F

Ferber, Edna,
Gay Old Dog, The, 42
Focus, 10, 80, 147
Freud, Sigmund, 27, 102

G

Galsworthy, John,
Evolution, 29
Quality, 29, 71, 98, 106, 225-232
Garland, Hamlin, 129
Generalities, avoidance of, 164
Getting started, 4
Glasgow, Ellen,
Barren Ground, 129
Glaspell, Susan,
Government Goat, 38, 85, 95
Jury of Her Peers, A, 74

H

Hackneyed expressions, 143
material, 23
Hardy, Thomas, 129, 133
Return of the Native, The, 132; *Son's Veto,* 29, 142
Harte, Bret, 128
Hawthorne, Nathaniel,
Ambitious Guest, The, 98
Birthmark, The, 11, 58, 85, 106, 124, 237-257
Great Stone Face, The, 98
Notebook, 68
Hemingway, Ernest,
Killers, The, 90, 112, 123, 173-184

Henry, O. (see "O. Henry")
Heredity, 26, 28
Hewlett, Maurice, 128
Hopper, James,
When It Happens, 114

I

Ideal, of short story, 8, 11
Imitation, 13
Impersonality, 156
Implication, 74-76
Insight, 66
Inspiration, 151-159
Integration, 15, 138
Intensity, 90, 138
Interpretation, 100, 157

J

Jacobson, Arthur, 158

K

Kipling, Rudyard, 61, 128
Beyond the Pale, 34, 97
Broken Link Handicap, The, 99
False Dawn, 40, 115, 118
In The Pride of His Youth, 114
Mark of the Beast, The, 116
Rescue of Pluffles, 39

L

Length of short story, 9
Lines of struggle, 47
Local color, 128
London, Jack,
To Build a Fire, 48

M

Mansfield, Katherine, 7, 8, 60, 66
Bliss, 135
Doll's House, The, 29, 58, 92, 124, 185-194
Fly, The, 60
Journal, 67, 68
Marketing, 167-169
Marks, Jeanette, 157
Martin, Everett Dean, 103, 105
Material, selection of, 8
Maugham, Somerset,
Rain, 14
Maupassant, Guy de, 25, 61
Adoption, The, 50, 85, 123, 267-274
La Mere Sauvage, 49
Moonlight, 15, 58, 82, 84, 86, 113, 120, 125, 139, 275-281
Necklace, The, 13, 25, 94, 124
Piece of String, The, 13, 25, 88, 124
Mood, 14
Moralizing, 99
Motives, 85, 95

N

Natural phenomena, 143
Nature of short story, 7-16
New literary form, 61
Newman, Frances,
Short Story's Mutations, The, 22, 94
Notebook, use of, 66

O

Objective angle, 112
O'Brien, Fitz-James,
What Was It? A Mystery, 40
O. Henry, 129
Gift of the Magi, The, 51
O'Neill, Eugene,
Emperor Jones, The, 14, 43, 136
Hairy Ape, The, 14, 43, 136
Order of events, 53
Ostenso, Martha,
Wild Geese, 74, 129

P

Passive voice, 162
Pattern thinking, 23
Personality,
creative, 151-159
study of, 102-110
Personal pronoun, use of with angle, 120
Petronious,
Matron of Ephesus, The, 94
Pitkin, Walter B., 7, 36, 93, 98
Plausibility, 39
Plot, 33-41
amount of, 59
definition, 36
ideas for, 42
necessity for, 89
test of, 35
Poe, Edgar Allan,
Berenice, 126
Black Cat, The, 126
Cask of Amontillado, 10, 29, 37, 58, 125, 259-266
Poe, Edgar Allan (*Continued*)
Descent into the Maelstrom, 126
Fall of the House of Usher, The, 9, 12, 97, 116, 126, 130, 135, 139
Gold Bug, The, 15
Ligeia, 14, 97, 126
Murders in the Rue Morgue, The, 52
Presentness, 11
Pronoun and angle, 120
Psychoanalysis, 102-104 (see "Freud")
Psychological justice, 61
Psychological objective angle, 113
Purpose of short story, 8, 11

R

Race, experience of, 157
Reading of biography, 152
Reality,
in characters, 64
in conflict, 31
in scenes, 87
Recognition, aim of short story, 39
Rejections, 6, 167
Repeating struggle, 57
Reporting vs. dramatic action, 86, 90
Reversal of situation, 22, 94

S

"Said," use of, 79
Scenes, 14, 49

Scientific causes and atmosphere, 133
Segment of life, 70
Senses, appeal to, 139
Setting, 122-144
  domination by, 130
Sex motive, 26
Single effect, 72
Sociology, contribution of, 107
Solidarity, 101, 157
Solution of plot, 92
Stages of action, 82-101
Steele, Wilbur D.,
  Meat, 28
  Six Dollars, 15, 28, 31, 58, 86, 95, 119, 120, 195-223
Stephens, James,
  Etched in Moonlight, 135-140
  Hunger, 89, 97
Stevenson, Robert L., 61
  Markheim, 117
Stilted language, 161, 162
Stimulation of genius, 157
Structure, amount of, 59 (see "Plot")
Style, 151
Subsconscious self, 154, 156
Subordinate character, 115
Suckow, Ruth, 7, 8,
  Little Girl From Town, The, 29, 79
Suggestion, 74, 76
Sure test, 83
Suspense, 17-19
Symbols, 106

T

Tarkington, Booth, 129
Tchekhov, 59
  Darling, The, 70
Theme, 34
Titles, 164
Traits,
  portrayal of, 73-81
  selection of, 63-72
Transitions, 163
True to life ideal, 37
Typical characters, 21

U

Unity, ideal of, 11
Universal character, 25, 128
University extension courses, 165
Uzzell, Thomas H., 26

V

Van Vechten, Carl, 129

W

Watson, John B., 105
Wharton, Edith,
  Ethan Frome, 16
  Writing of Fiction, The, 87, 91, 111
Wilkins, Mary E., 129
  New England Nun, A, 53, 71, 96, 98
  Revolt of Mother, The, 106
  Village Singer, The, 9, 71, 93
Williams, Blanche C., 51
Winslow, Thyra S.,
  Mamie Carpenter, 70
Wordiness, 161